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IRIS MURDOCH

The Black Prince

Iris Murdoch

The Black Prince

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Editor's Foreword

I am in more than one way responsible for the work that follows. The author of it, my friend Bradley Pearson, has placed the arrangements for publication in my hands. In this humble mechanical sense it is through my agency that these pages now reach the public. I am also the "dear friend" (and such) who is referred to and at times addressed in the book. I am not however an actor in the drama which Pearson recounts. My friendship with Bradley Pearson dates from a time in our lives posterior to the events here narrated. This has been a time of tribulation when we needed and happily found in each other the blessings of friendship. I can say indeed with confidence that were it not for the encouragement and sympathy which I was able to give to Bradley, this story would probably have remained untold. Those who cry out the truth to an indifferent world too often weary, fall silent or come to doubt their own wit. Without my help this could have been so with Bradley Pearson. He needed someone to believe him and someone to believe in him. He found me, his alter ego, at the time needful.

What follows is in its essence as well as in its contour a love story. I mean that it is deeply as well as superficially so. Man's creative struggle, his search for wisdom and truth, is a love story. What follows is ambiguous and sometimes tortuously told. Man's searchings and his strugglings are ambiguous and vowed to hidden ways. Those who live by that dark light will understand. And yet: what can be simpler than a tale of love and more charming? That art gives charm to terrible things is perhaps its glory, perhaps its curse. Art is a doom. It has been the doom of Bradley Pearson. And in a quite different way it is my own.

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P. Loxias editor

Bradley Pearson's Foreword

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I am aware that people often have completely distorted general ideas of what they are like. Men truly manifest themselves in the long patterns of their acts, and not in any nutshell of self-theory. This is supremely true of the artist, who appears, however much he may imagine that he hides, in the revealed extension of his work. And so am I too here exhibited, whose pitiful instinct is alas still for a concealment quite at odds with my trade. Under this cautionary rubric I shall however now attempt a general description of myself. And now I am speaking, as I explained, in the persona of the self of several years ago, the often inglorious "hero" of the tale that follows. I am fifty-eight years old. I am a writer. "A writer" is indeed the simplest and also the most accurate general description of me. In so far as I am also a psychologist, an amateur philosopher, a student of human affairs, I am so because these things are a part of being the kind of writer that I am. I have always been a seeker. And my seeking has taken the form of that attempt to tell truth of which I have just spoken. I have, I hope and I believe, kept my gift pure. This means, among other things, that I have never been a successful writer. I have never tried to please at the expense of truth. I have known, for long periods, the torture of a life without self-expression. The most potent and sacred command which can be laid upon any artist is the command: wait. Art has its martyrs, not least those who have preserved their silence. There are, I hazard, saints of art who have simply waited mutely all their lives rather than profane the purity of a single page with anything less than what is perfectly appropriate and beautiful, that is to say, with anything less than what is true.

As is well known, I have published very little. I say "as is well known," relying here for my fame upon publicity deriving from my adventures outside the purlieus of art. My name is not unknown, but this alas is not because I am a writer. As a writer I have reached and doubtless will reach only a perceptive few. The paradox perhaps of my whole life, and it is an absurdity upon which I do not cease to meditate, is that the dramatic story which follows, so unlike the rest of my work, may well prove to be my only "best seller." There are undoubtedly here the elements of crude drama, the "fabulous" events which simple people love to hear of. And indeed I have had, in this connection, my own good share of being front-page news."

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I shall describe myself a little more. My parents kept a shop. This is important, though not as important as Francis Marloe thinks, and certainly not in the way that he thinks. I mention Francis first of any of my "players" not because he is the most important: Francis is not important at all and has no deep connection with the course of these events. He is a subsidiary, a sidesman, in the story as I fear he is generally in life. Poor Francis will never be the hero of anything. He would make an excellent fifth wheel to any coach. But I make him as it were the mascot of the tale, partly because in a purely mechanical sense he opens it, and if on a certain day he had not, and so on, I might never, and so on. There is another paradox. One must constantly meditate upon the absurdities of chance, a subject even more edifying than the subject of death. Partly too I give a special place to Francis because he is, of the main actors in this drama, probably the only one who believes that I am not a liar. My gratitude to you, Francis Marloe, if you are still among the living and should chance to see these words. That another, later, believed me has proved of infinitely greater value. But you were then the only one who saw and understood. Across the aeons of time which have passed since that tragedy, I salute you, Francis.

My parents kept a shop, a sort of paper shop, down in Croydon. The shop sold daily papers and magazines, writing paper and so on, and horrible "gifts." My sister, Priscilla, and I lived in this shop. I do not mean that we actually ate and slept in the shop. We did in fact often have our tea there, and I have a "memory" of sleeping under the counter. But the shop was the house and the mythical domain of our childhood. Some fortunate children have a garden, a landscape, as the "local habitation" of their early years. We had the shop: its drawers, its shelves, its smells, its endless empty cardboard boxes, its particular dirt. It was a shabby unsuccessful shop. Our parents were shabby unsuccessful people. They both died when I was in my thirties, my father first, my mother not long after. They lived to see my first book published. They were proud of me. My mother filled me with exasperation and shame but I loved her. (Be quiet, Francis Marloe.) My father I simply disliked. Or perhaps I have forgotten my affection for him. One can forget love, as you will perceive that I shortly find out.

I will not go on about the shop. I still dream about it at least once a week. Francis Marloe thought this very significant when I told him once. But Francis belongs to that sad crew of semi-educated theorizers who prefer any general blunted "symbolic" explanation to the horror of confronting a unique human history. Francis wanted to "explain" me. In my moment of fame, a number of other and much

cleverer people attempted this also. But any human person is infinitely more complex than this type of explanation. By "infinitely" (or should I say "almost infinitely"? Alas I am no philosopher) I mean that there are not only more details, but more kinds of details with more kinds of relations than these diminishers can dream of. You might as well try to "explain" a Michelangelo on a piece of graph paper. Only art explains, and that cannot itself be explained. We and art are made for each other, and where that bond fails human life fails. Only this analogy holds, only this mirror shows a just image. Of course we have an "unconscious mind" and this is partly what my book is about. But there is no general chart of that lost continent. Certainly not a "scientific" one.

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I am not, then, proposing to describe my life as a "taxman." For some reason which I cannot fully understand the profession of "taxman," like the profession of "dentist," seems to excite laughter. But this laughter is, I suspect, uneasy. Both taxman and dentist only too readily image forth the deeper horrors of human life: that we must pay, perhaps ruinously, for our pleasures, that our resources are lent, not given, and that our most irreplaceable faculties decay even as they grow. And in an immediate sense, what makes a man more obsessively miserable than income tax or the toothache? No doubt this accounts for the defensive covertly hostile mockery with which one is greeted when confessing to either of these trades. I used to think however that no one but fools like Francis Marloe actually believed that tax inspectors chose their profession out of secret sadism. I cannot think anyone less sadistic than myself. I am gentle to timidity. Yet latterly even my quiet and respectable calling has been used as evidence against me.

When this story starts--and I will not much longer delay its inception--I had already retired, at an earlier age than is usual, from the tax office. I worked as an Inspector of Taxes because I had to earn a living which I knew I should never earn as a writer. I retired when I had at last saved enough money to assure myself a modest annuity. I have lived, as I say, until latterly, without drama, but with unfailing purpose. I looked forward to and I toiled for my freedom to devote all my time to writing. Yet on the other hand, I did manage to write, and without more than occasional repining, during my years of bondage, and I would not, as some unsatisfied writers do, blame my lack of productivity upon my lack of time. I have been on the whole a lucky man. And I would say that even now. Perhaps especially I would say it now.

The shock of leaving the office was greater than I had anticipated. Hartbourne warned me that it would be so. I did not believe him. Perhaps I am, more than I realized, a creature of routine. Perhaps too, with scarcely pardonable stupidity, I imagined that inspiration would come with freedom. I did not expect the complete withdrawal of my gift. In the years before, I worked steadily. That is, I wrote steadily and I destroyed steadily. I will not say how many pages I have destroyed, the number is immense. There was pride in this as well as sorrow. Sometimes I felt at a (terrible phrase) dead end. But I never despaired of excellence. Hope and faith and absolute devotion kept me plodding onward, ageing, living alone with my emotions. And at least I found that I could always write something.

But when I had given up the tax office and could sit at my desk at home every morning and think any thoughts I pleased, I found I had no thoughts at all. This too I suffered with my bitterest patience. I waited. I tried to develop a new routine: monotony, out of which value springs. I waited, I listened. I live, as I shall explain soon at more length, in a noisy part of London, a seedy region that was once genteel. I suppose I have myself, together with my neighbourhood, made my pilgrimage away from gentility. Noise, which had never distressed me before, began to do so. For the first time in my life I urgently wanted silence.

Of course, as might be pointed out with barbed humour, I had always in a sense been a devotee of silence. Arnold Baffin once said something like this to me, laughing, and hurt me. Three short books in forty years of sustained literary effort is not exactly garrulity. And indeed if I understand anything that is precious, I did understand how important it was to keep one's mouth shut until the right moment even if this meant a totally voiceless life. Writing is like getting married. One should never commit oneself until one is amazed at one's luck. I hate, in any context, an intemperate flux of words. Contrary to what is modishly thought, the negative is stronger than the positive and its master. What I needed now however was literal silence.

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As I now read this Foreward through I see how meagrely it conveys me. How little perhaps can words convey except in the hands of a genius. Though I am a creative person, I am a puritan rather than an aesthete. I know that human life is horrible. I know that it is utterly unlike art. I have no religion except my own task of being. Conventional religions are dream stuff. Always a world of fear and horror lies but a millimetre away. Any man, even the greatest, can be broken in a moment and has no refuge. Any theory which denies this

is a lie. For myself, I have no theories. True politics is simply the drying of tears and the endless fight for freedom. Without freedom there is no art and no truth. I revere great artists and the men who say no to tyrants.

It remains to record a dedication.

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A celebration of love

Part one

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I lived then and had long lived in a ground-floor flat in a small shabby pretty court of terrace houses in North Soho, not far from the Post Office Tower, an area of perpetual seedy brouhaha. I preferred this genteel metropolitan poverty to the styleless suburban affluence favoured by the Baffins. My "rooms" were all at the back. My bedroom looked onto dustbins and a fire escape. My sitting- room onto a plain brick wall caked with muck. The sitting-room, half a room really (the other half, stripped and degraded, was the bedroom), had wooden panels of that powdery dignified shade of green which can only be achieved by about fifty years of fading. This place I had crammed with too much furniture, with Victorian and Oriental bric-a-brac, with tiny heterogeneous objets d'art, little cushions, inlaid trays, velvet cloths, antimacassars even, lace even. I amass rather than collect. I am also meticulously tidy though resigned to dust. A sunless and cosy womb my flat was, with a highly wrought interior and no outside. Only from the front door of the house, which was not my front door, could one squint up at sky over tall buildings and see above the serene austere erection of the Post Office Tower.

So it was that I deliberately delayed my departure. What if I had not done so? I was proposing to disappear for the whole summer, to a place incidentally which I had never seen but had adopted blind. I had not told Arnold where I was going. I had mystified him. Why, I wonder? Out of some sort of obscure spite? Mystery always bulks larger. I had told him with a firm vagueness that I should be travelling abroad, no address. Why these lies? I suppose I did it partly to surprise him. I was a man who never went anywhere. Perhaps I felt it was time I gave Arnold a surprise. Neither had I informed my sister, Priscilla, that I was leaving London. There was nothing odd in that. She lived in Bristol with a husband whom I found distasteful. Suppose I had left the house before Francis Marloe knocked on the door? Suppose the tram had arrived at the tram stop and taken Prinzip away before the Archduke's car came round the corner?

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Then the front doorbell (already too long delayed by my rambling narrative) rang.

The person who stood outside (within the front door of the house, but without my subsidiary front door) was strange to me. He seemed to be trembling, perhaps from the recent attentions of the wind, perhaps from nerves or alcohol. He wore a very old blue raincoat and a stringy fawn scarf of the throttling variety. He was stout (the raincoat failed to button) and not tall, with copious greyish longish frizzy hair and a round face and a slightly hooked nose and big very red lips and eyes set very close together. He looked, I later thought, rather like a caricature of a bear. Real bears, I believe, have eyes rather wide apart, but caricatured bears usually have close eyes, possibly to indicate bad temper or cunning. I did not like the look of him at all. Something significantly ill-omened which I could not yet define emanated from him. And I could smell him from where he stood.

Perhaps I might pause here yet again for a moment to describe myself. I am thin and tall, just over six feet, fairish and not yet bald, with light fine silky rather faded straight hair. I have a bland diffident nervous sensitive face and thin lips and blue eyes. I do not wear glasses. I look considerably younger than my age.

"She's back," I heard him say.

"What? Who's back? I do not understand you."

"Christian's back. He's dead. She's back."

"Christian."

This was the name, not pronounced now in my presence for very many years, of my former wife.

I opened the door wider and the person on the step, whom I now recognized, slipped, or dodged, into the flat. I retreated into the sitting-room, he following.

"You don't remember me."

"Yes, I do."

"I'm Francis Marloe, you know, your brother-in-law."

"Yes, yes--"As was, that is. I thought you should know. She's a widow, he left her everything, she's back in London, back in your old place--"Did she send you?"

"Here? Well, not exactly--"

"Did she or didn't she?"

"Well, no, I just heard through the lawyer. She's back in your old place! God!"

"I see no need for you to come--"So she's written you? I wondered if she'd have written you."

"Of course she hasn't written to me!"

"I thought of course you'd want to see her--"I don't want to see her! I cannot think of anyone I less want to see or hear of!"

I shall not attempt here to describe my marriage. Some impression of it will doubtless emerge. For the present story, its general nature rather than its detail is important. It was not a success. At first I saw her as a life-bringer. Then I saw her as a death-bringer. Some women are like that. There is a sort of energy which seems to reveal the world: then one day you find you are being devoured. Fellow victims will know what I mean. Possibly I am a natural bachelor. Christian was certainly a natural flirt. Sheer silliness can be attractive in a woman. I was, of course, attracted. She was, I suppose, a rather "sexy" woman. Some people thought me lucky. She brought, what I detest, disorder into my life. She was a great maker of scenes. In the end I hated her. Five years of marriage seemed to have convinced both of us of the utter impossibility of this state.

However, shortly after our divorce Christian married a rich unlettered American called Evandale, went to live in Illinois, and as far as I was concerned disappeared forever.

There is nothing quite like the dead dull feel of a failed marriage. Nor is there anything like one's hatred for an ex-spouse. (How can such a person dare to be happy?) I cannot credit those who speak of "friendship" in such a context. I lived for years with a sense of things irrevocably soiled and spoiled, it could give suddenly such a sad feel to the world sometimes. I could not liberate myself from her mind. This had nothing to do with love. Those who have suffered this sort of bondage will understand. Some people are just "diminishers" and "spoilers" for others. I suppose almost everybody diminishes someone. A saint would be nobody's spoiler. Most of one's acquaintances however can be blessedly forgotten when not present. Out of sight out of mind is a charter of human survival. Not so Christian, she was ubiquitous: her consciousness was rapacious, her thoughts could damage, passing like noxious rays through space and time. Her remarks were memorable. Only good old America cured her for me in the end. I put her away with a tedious man in a tedious and very distant town and was able at last to feel that she had died. What a relief.

Francis Marloe was another matter. Neither he nor his thoughts had ever been important to me, nor as far as I could see to anyone. He was Christian's younger brother, treated by her with indulgent contempt. He never married. After lengthy trying he qualified as a doctor, but was soon struck off the register for some irregularity in the prescription of drugs. I learnt later with abhorrence that he had set up in business as a self-styled "psychoanalyst." Later still I heard he had taken to drink. If I had been told that he had committed suicide I should have heard the news without either concern or surprise. I was not pleased to see him again. He had in fact altered almost beyond recognition. He had been a slim tripping blond-haloed faun. Now he looked coarse, fat, red-faced, pathetic, slightly wild, slightly sinister, perhaps a little mad. He had always been very stupid. However at that moment I was not concerned about Mr. Francis Marloe, but about the absolutely terrifying news which he had brought me.

"I am surprised that you felt it your business to come here. It

was an impertinence. I don't want to know anything about my ex-wife. I finished with that business long ago."

"And don't call me 'Brad.' I'm catching a train."

"I won't keep you for a moment, I'll just explain, I've been thinking--yes, I'll make it snappy, just please listen to me, please, I beseech you--Look, it's this, you see you're the first person Chris will be looking up in London--" What?"

"She'll come straight to you, I bet, I intuit it--"Are you completely mad? Don't you know how--I can't discuss this--There can be no possible communication, this was utterly finished with years ago."

"No, Brad, you see--"Don't call me 'Brad'!"

"All right, all right, Bradley, sorry, please don't be cross, surely you know Chris, she cared awfully for you, she really cared, much more than for old Evans, she'll come to you, even if it's only out of curiosity--"I won't be here," I said. This suddenly sounded horribly plausible. Perhaps there is a deep malign streak in all of us. Christian certainly had more than her share of sheer malignancy. She might indeed almost instinctively come to me, out of curiosity, out of malice, as cats are said to jump onto the laps of cat-haters. One does feel a certain curiosity about an ex-spouse, a desire doubtless that they should have suffered remorse and disappointment. One only wants bad news. One wants to gloat. Christian would yearn to satisfy herself of my wretchedness.

Francis was going on, "She'll want to show off, she's rich now, you see, sort of merry-widow style, she'll want to show off to her old friends, anybody would, oh yes, she'll be sniffing after you, you'll see, and--"

"I'm not interested," I cried, "I'm not interested!"

"You are interested, you know. Why if ever I saw an interested look on a bloke's face--"Has she got children?"

"There you are, you are. No, she hasn't. Now I've always liked you, Brad, and wanted to see you again, I've always admired you, I read your book--"Which book?"

"I forgot its name. It was great. Maybe you wondered why I didn't turn up ?

"No!"

"Well, I was bashful, felt I was small fry like, but now with Christian turning up it's--You see, I'm in debt up to the neck, lave to keep changing my digs and that--Now Chris sort of paid ic off, you might say, some time back, and I thought that if you Chris were likely to get together again--"You mean you want me to intercede for you?"

"Sort of, sort of--"Oh God!" I said, "Get out, will you?" The idea of my prising money out of Christian for her delinquent brother

struck me as unusually lunatic even for Francis.

"And, you know, I was knocked when I heard she was back, it's a shock, it changes a lot of things, I wanted to come and chew it over with somebody, for human interest like, and you were natural--I say, is there any drink in the house?"

"Just go, will you please."

"I intuit she'll want you, want to impress you and that--We broke down in letters, you see, I was always wanting money, and then she got a lawyer to stop me writing to her--But now it's like a new start, if you could just sort of ease me in, bring me along like--"

"You want me to pose as your friend?"

"But we could be friends, Brad--Look, is there anything to drink in the house?"

"No."

The telephone began to ring.

"Go away, please," I said, "and stay away."

"Bradley, have a heart--"Out!"

He stood before me with that air of revolting humility. I threw open the sitting-room door and the door of the flat. I picked up the telephone in the hall.

Arnold Baffin's voice was on the wire. He spoke quietly, rather slowly. "Bradley, could you come round here, please? I think that I may have just killed Rachel."

I said immediately, quietly too but in emotion, "Arnold, don't be silly. Don't be silly!"

"Could you come round at once, please." His voice sounded like a recorded announcement.

I said, "Have you called a doctor?"

A moment's pause. "No."

"Well, do so!"

"I'll--explain--Could you come round at once--"Arnold," I said, "you can't have killed her--You're talking nonsense--You can't have--"

A moment's pause. "Maybe." His voice was toneless as if calm. A matter doubtless of severe shock.

"What happened--?"

"Bradley, could you--"Yes," I said, "I'll come round at once. I'll get a taxi." I replaced the receiver.

It may be relevant to record that my first general feeling on hearing what Arnold had to say was one of curious joy. Before the reader sets me down as a monster of callousness let him look into his own heart. Such reactions are not after all so abnormal and may be said in that minimal sense at least to be almost excusable. We naturally take in the catastrophes of our friends a pleasure which genuinely does not preclude friendship. This is partly but not entirely

because we enjoy being empowered as helpers. The unexpected or inappropriate catastrophe is especially piquant. I was very attached to both Arnold and Rachel. But there is a natural tribal hostility between the married and the unmarried. I cannot stand the shows so often quite instinctively put on by married people to insinuate that they are not only more fortunate but in some way more moral than you are. Moreover to help their case the unmarried person often naively assumes that all marriages are happy unless shown to be otherwise. The Baffin marriage had always seemed pretty sound. This sudden vignette of home life set the ideas in a turmoil.

Still rosy with the rush of blood which Arnold's words had occasioned, and also, I should make clear (there is no contradiction), very alarmed and upset, I turned round and saw Francis, whose existence I had forgotten.

"Anything the matter?" said Francis.

"No."

"I heard you say something about a doctor."

"The wife of a friend of mine has had an accident. She fell. I'm just going over."

"Shall I come too?" said Francis. "I might be useful. After all, I am still a doctor in the eyes of God."

I thought for a moment and said, "All right." We got a taxi.

I pause here to say another word or two about my protege Arnold Baffin. I am anxious (this is not just a phrase, I feel anxiety) about the clarity and justice of my presentation of Arnold, since this story is, from a salient point of view, the story of my relations with Arnold and the astounding climax to which these relations led. I "discovered" Arnold, a considerably younger man, when I was already modestly established as a writer, and he, recently out of college, was just finishing his first novel. I had by then "got rid of" my wife and was experiencing one of those "fresh starts" which I have so often hoped would lead on to achievement. He was a schoolmaster, having lately graduated in English literature at the university of Reading. We met at a meeting. He coyly confessed his novel. I expressed polite interest. He sent me the almost completed typescript. (This was, of course, *Tobias and the Fallen Angel*. Still, I think, his best work.) I thought the piece had some merits and I helped him to find a publisher for it. I also reviewed it quite favourably when it came out. Thus began one of the most, commercially speaking, successful of recent literary careers. Arnold at once, contrary, as it happens, to my advice, gave up his job as a teacher and devoted himself to "writing." He wrote easily, producing every year a book which pleased the public taste. Wealth, fame followed.

It has been suggested, especially in the light of more recent

events, that I envied Arnold's success as a writer. I would like at jnce and categorically to deny this. I sometimes envied his freedom to write at a time when I was tied to my desk. But I did not in general feel envy of Arnold Baffin for one very simple reason: it seemed to me that he achieved success at the expense of merit. As his discoverer and patron I felt from the start identified with his activities. And I felt, rather, distress that a promising young writer should have laid aside true ambition and settled so quickly into a popular mould. I respected his industry and I admired his "career." He had lany gifts other than purely literary ones. I did not, however, much like his books. Tact readily supervened however and, as I have said, we soon instinctively avoided certain topics of conversation.

I should make clear that Arnold was not in any crude sense "spoilt" by success. He was no tax-dodger with a yacht and a house in Malta. (We sometimes laughingly discussed tax-avoidance, but never tax-evasion.) He lived in a fairly large, but not immodest, suburban villa in a "good class" housing estate in Ealing. His domestic life was, even to an irritating extent, lacking in style. It was not that he put on an act of being "the ordinary chap." In some way he was "the ordinary chap," and eschewed the vision which might, for better as well as worse, have made a very different use of his money. I never knew Arnold to purchase any object of beauty. He was indeed quite deficient in visual taste, though he was rather aggressively fond of music. As to his person, he continued to look like a schoolmaster, dressed shapelessly, and retained a raw shy boyish appearance. It never occurred to him to play "the famous writer." Or perhaps intelligence, of which he had plenty, suggested this way of playing it. He wore steel-rimmed specs, behind which his eyes were a very pale bluish-green, rather striking. His nose was pointed, his face always rather greasy, but healthy looking. There was a general lack of colour. Something of an albino? He was accounted, and perhaps was, good-looking. He was always combing his hair.

Arnold stared at me and pointed mutely at Francis. We were standing in the hall. Arnold looked unlike himself, his face waxy, his hair jagged, his eyes without glasses crazed and vague. There was a red mark like a Chinese character upon his cheek.

"This is Dr. Marloe. Dr. Marloe--Arnold Baffin. Dr. Marloe happened to be with me when you rang up about your wife's accident." I stressed the last word.

"Doctor," said Arnold. "Yes, you see--she--"She fell?" I suggested.

"Yes. Is he--is this chap a--medical doctor?"

"Yes," I said. "A friend of mine." This untruth at least conveyed important information.

"Are you the Arnold Baffin?" said Francis.

"Yes, he is," I said.

"I say, I do admire your books--I've read--"What's the situation?" I said to Arnold. I thought he looked as if he was drunk, and immediately after I could smell drink.

Arnold, making some sort of effort, said slowly, "She locked herself into our bedroom. After it--happened--She was bleeding a lot - I thought--I don't quite know what--the injury was--At any rate--At any rate--" He stopped.

"Go on, Arnold. Look, you'd better sit down. Hadn't he better sit down?"

"Arnold Baffin," said Francis, to himself.

Arnold leaned back against the hall stand. He leaned his head back into a coat that was hanging there, closed his eyes for a moment, and then went on. "Sorry. You see. She was sort of crying and wailing in there for a time. I mean in the bedroom. Now it's all quiet and she doesn't answer at all. I'm afraid she may be unconscious or--"

"Can't you break open the door?"

"I tried to, I tried to, but the chisel, the--outside woodwork just broke away and I couldn't get any--"Sit down, Arnold, for Christ's sake." I pushed him onto a chair.

"And you can't see through the keyhole because the key--"She's probably just upset and won't answer out of--you know--"

"Yes," he said, "I didn't want to--If it's all a--I don't know quite what--You go and try, Bradley--"

"Where's your chisel?"

"Up there. But it's a small one. I can't find--"Well, you two stay here," I said. "I'll just go up and see what's going on. I bet you anything--Arnold, stay here and sit down!"

I stood outside the bedroom door, which had been mildly disfigured by Arnold's efforts. A lot of paint had flaked off and lay like white petals upon the fawn carpet. The chisel lay there too. I tried the handle and called, "Rachel. It's Bradley. Rachel!"

Silence.

"I'll get a hammer," I could hear Arnold, invisible, saying downstairs.

"Rachel, Rachel, please answer--" The real panic had got inside me now. I pressed all my weight on the door. It was solid and well made. "Rachel!"

Silence.

I hurled myself at the door, shouting, "Rachel!" Then I stopped, and listened very carefully.

There was a tiny sound from within, a sort of little creeping mouse-like sound. I said aloud, "Oh let her be all right, let her be all

right."

More creeping. Then very softly in a scarcely audible whisper. "Bradley."

"Rachel, Rachel, are you all right?"

Silence. Creeping. Then a little hissing sigh. "Yes."

I shouted to the others, "She's all right! She's all right!"

I heard them saying something behind me on the stairs.
"Rachel, let me in, can you? Let me in."

There was a scuffling sound, then Rachel's voice, breathy and low down, close against the door, "You come in. Not anyone else."

I heard the key turn in the lock and I pushed quickly into the room, catching a glimpse of Arnold who was standing on the stairs with Francis behind him a little lower down. I saw the two faces very clearly, like faces in a crucifixion crowd which represent the painter and his friend. Arnold's face was distorted into a sort of sneer of anguish. Francis's was bright with malign curiosity. Suitable expressions for a crucifixion. Inside I nearly fell over Rachel who was sitting on the floor. She was moaning softly now, trying frantically to turn the key again in the lock. I turned it for her and then sat down on the floor beside her.

Since Rachel Baffin is one of the main actors, in a crucial sense perhaps the main actor, in my drama I should like now to pause briefly to describe her. I had known her for over twenty years, almost as long as I had known Arnold, yet at the time that I speak of I did not really, as I later realized, know her well. There was a sort of vagueness. Some women, in fact in my experience many women, have a sort of "abstract" quality about them. Is this a real sex difference? Perhaps this quality is really just unselfishness. (In this respect, you know where you are with men!) In Rachel's case it was certainly not lack of intelligence. There was a vagueness which womanly affection and the custom of my quasi-family friendship with the Baffins did not dispel, even increased. Of course men play roles, but women play roles too, blander ones. They have, in the play of life, fewer good lines. This may be to make a mystery of what had simpler causes. Rachel was an intelligent woman married to a famous man: and instinctively such a woman behaves as a function of her husband, she reflects, as it were, all the light onto him. Her "blankness" repelled even curiosity. One does not expect such a woman to have ambition: whereas Arnold and I were both, in quite different ways, tormented, perhaps even defined, by ambition. Rachel was (in a way in which one would never think this of a man) a "good specimen," a "good sport." One relied on her. There she was. She looked (then) just like a big handsome sweet contented woman, the efficient wife of a well-known charmer. She was a large smooth-faced, slightly freckled, reddish-

blond person, with straight-ish gingery wiry hair and a pale complexion, a bit tall for a woman and generally on a larger scale physically than her husband. She had been putting on weight and some might have called her fat. She was always busy, often with charities and mild left-wing politics. (Arnold cared nothing for politics.) She was an excellent "housewife," and often referred to herself by this title.

"Rachel, are you all right?"

"Rachel, are you hurt? I've got a doctor here--She began awkwardly to get up, again pushing away my assisting hand. I got a whiff of alcohol from her panting breath. She knelt upon her dress and I heard it tear. Then she half ran half fell across the room to the disordered bed, where she flopped on her back, tugging at the bedclothes, ineffectually because she was half lying on them, then covering her face with both hands and crying in an appalling wailing manner, lying with her feet wide apart in a graceless self-absorption of grief.

"Rachel, please control yourself. Drink some water." The sound of that abandoned weeping was scarcely bearable, and something far too intense to be called embarrassment, yet of that quality, made me both reluctant and anxious to look at her. A woman's crying can sicken one with fright and guilt, and this was terrible crying.

Arnold outside shouted, "Please let me in, please, please--"Stop it, Rachel," I said. "I can't bear this. Stop it. I'm going to open the door."

"No, no," she whispered, a sort of voiceless whine. "Not Arnold, not--" Was she still afraid of him?

"I'm going to let the doctor in," I said.

"No, no."

I opened the door and placed my hand on Arnold's chest. "Go in and look at her," I said to Francis. "There's some blood."

Arnold began to call out, "Let me see you, please, darling, don't be angry, oh please--I pushed him back towards the head of the stairs. Francis went inside and locked the door again, whether out of delicacy or professional caution.

Arnold sat down on the stairs and began to moan. "Oh dear, oh dear, oh dear--" My awkward appalled embarrassment mingled now with a horrible fascinated interest. Arnold, beyond caring about what impression he made, was running his hands again and again through his hair. "Oh I am a bloody fool, I am a bloody fool--I said, "Steady on. What happened exactly?"

"Where are the scissors?" shouted Francis from within.

"Top drawer dressing table," Arnold shouted back. "Christ,

what does he want scissors for? Is he going to operate or something?"

"What happened? Look, better move down a bit."

I pushed Arnold and he hobbled stooping, holding the banisters, past the turn of the stair, and sat on the lowest step, holding his head in his hands and staring at the zigzag design of the hall carpet. The hall was always a bit dim because of the stained glass in the door. I went down past him and sat on a chair, feeling very odd, upset, excited.

"Oh Christ, oh Christ. Do you think she'll forgive me?"

"Of course. What--?"

"Thank God," said Arnold. "Do you know, I think she may have been shamming all the time. Anyway, thank God. What should--?"

"There's nothing seriously wrong. She's got a very nasty lump on her head and she's a bit in shock. Could be a touch of concussion. Keep her in bed and keep the room dark. Aspirins, any of her usual sedatives, hot-water bottles, hot drinks, I mean tea and that. Better let her see her own doctor. She'll soon be herself again."

"Oh thank you so much, Doctor," said Arnold. "So she's all right, thank heaven."

"She wants to see you," said Francis to me. We had all moved back up to the landing.

Arnold began again calling, "My darling, please--"I'll deal," I said. I half opened the bedroom door, which was unlocked.

"Only Bradley. Only Bradley." The voice, still almost inaudible, was firmer.

"Oh Christ. This is awful. I've had enough--" said Arnold. "Darling--"You go down and give yourself another drink," I told him.

"I wouldn't mind a drink," said Francis.

"Oh don't be angry with me, darling--"Could you chuck out my mac," said Francis. "I left it in there on the floor."

I went in and threw the macintosh out and closed the door again.

I heard retreating steps as Arnold and Francis went away down the stairs.

"Lock the door, please."

I locked it.

Francis had pulled the curtains and there was a sort of thick pink twilight in the room. The evening sun, now palely shining, made the big floppy flowers on the chintz curtains glow in a melancholy way. The room had the rather sinister tedium which some bedrooms have, a sort of weary banality which is a reminder of death. A dressing table can be a terrible thing. The Baffins had placed theirs in the window where it obstructed the light and presented its ugly back to

the road. The plate-glass "table" surface was dusty and covered with cosmetic tubes and bottles and balls of hair. The chest of drawers had all its drawers gaping, spewing pink underwear and shoulder straps. The bed was chaotic, violent, the green artificial-silk coverlet swooping down on one side and the sheets and blankets creased up into a messy mass, like an old face. There was a warm intimate embarrassing smell of sweat and face powder. The whole room breathed the flat horror of genuine mortality, dull and spiritless and final.

I do not know why I thought then so promptly and prophetically of death. Perhaps it was because Rachel, half under the bedclothes, had covered her face with the sheet.

Her feet, with glossy high-heeled shoes on, protruded from under the green coverlet. I said timidly, almost as if making conversation and to establish a rapport, "Here, let me take your shoes off."

She remained stiff while, with some difficulty, I pulled off both shoes. I felt the soft warmth of the damp brown stocking foot. A pungent sour odour joined the vapid smell of the room. I wiped my hands on my trousers. f "Better get properly into bed. Look, I'll straighten out your bedclothes a bit."

She shifted slightly, removing the sheet from her face, and even lifting her legs so that I could pull out a blanket from under them. I arranged her a little bit, pulling the blankets up and turning the sheet back over them. She had stopped crying and was stroking the bruise on her face. The bruise seemed bluer, creeping round the eye socket, and the eye itself was reduced to a watery slit. She lay there, her moist disfigured mouth slightly open, staring at the ceiling.

"I'll fill you a hot-water bottle, shall I?"

I found a hot-water bottle and filled it from the hot tap in the wash basin. Its soiled woolly cover smelt of sweat and sleep. I got it a bit wet on the outside, but it felt quite warm. I lifted the sheet and blanket and thrust it in beside her thigh.

"Rachel, aspirins? These are aspirins, aren't they?"

"No, thank you."

"Do you good."

"No."

"You'll be all right, the doctor said so."

She sighed very deeply and flopped her hand back onto the bed, lying now with both hands symmetrically by her sides, palms upward, like a limp disentombed Christ figure, still bearing the marks of ill treatment. Tufts of cut hair adhered to the dried blood on the bosom of her blue dress. She said in a hollow louder voice, "This is so awful, so awful, so awful."

"You'll be all right, Rachel, the doctor says--"I feel so utterly--defeated. I shall--die of shame."

"Nonsense, Rachel. It's just one of those things."

"And he asks you round--to see it all."

"Rachel, he was shaking like a leaf, he thought you were unconscious in here, he was terrified."

"I shall never forgive him. Be my witness now. I shall never forgive him. Never, never, never. Not if he were to kneel at my feet for twenty years. A woman does not forgive this ever. She won't save a man at the end. If he were drowning, I'd watch."

"Rachel, you don't mean this. Please don't talk in this awful sort of theatrical way. Of course you'll forgive him. I'm sure there were faults on both sides. After all you hit him too, you put your monogram on his cheek."

"Ach--" Her exclamation expressed harsh, almost vulgar, disgust. "Never," she said, "never, never. Oh I am--so unhappy--' The whimpering and the spilling tears began again. Her face was flaming hot.

"Stop, please. You must rest. Do take some aspirins. Try to sleep a little. I'll get you some tea, would you like that?"

"Rachel, don't, don't, don't, I won't listen, you don't mean any of this rigmarole. Don't say such things to me. You'll regret it later."

"I'm just as clever as he is. He wouldn't let me take a job. I obeyed him, I've always obeyed him. I haven't any private things. He owns the world. It's all his, his, his. I won't save him at the end. I'll watch him drown. I'll watch him burn."

You don't mean it, Rachel. Better not say it."

"And I won't forgive you either for having seen me like this with my face bruised to pieces and heard me talk horribly like this. I'll smile at you again but I won't forgive you in my heart."

"Rachel, Rachel, you are upsetting me so!"

"And now you'll go downstairs and talk about me vilely to him. I know how men talk."

"I fill you with disgust. A broken whimpering middle-aged woman."

"1VT» No--"Ach--" Again the horrible sound of aggressive violent disgust. "Go away now, leave me, please. Leave me alone with my thoughts and my torture and my punishment. I shall cry all night, all night. Sorry, Bradley. Tell Arnold I'm going to rest now. Tell him not to come near me again today. Tomorrow I will try to be as usual. There will be no recriminations, no reproaches, nothing. How can I reproach him? He will become angry again, he will frighten me again. Better to be a slave. Tell him I will be as usual tomorrow. Of course he knows that, he won't worry, he's feeling better already. Only let me

not see him today."

"All right, I'll tell him. Don't be cross with me, Rachel. It's not my fault."

"Oh, go away."

"Shall I get you some tea? The doctor said tea."

"Go away."

I went out of the room and closed the door quietly behind me. I heard a soft bound and then the key turning in the lock. I went down the stairs feeling very shaken and, yes, she had been right, disgusted.

It had become darker, the sun no longer shining, and the interior of the house seemed brown and chill. I made my way to the drawing-room at the back of the house where Arnold and Francis were talking. An electric fire and a lamp had been turned on. I noticed broken glass, broken china, a stain on the carpet. The drawing-room was a big over-patterned room with a lot of pseudo-tapestries and bad modern lithographs. Arnold's two big stereo loudspeakers, covered with a sort of fawn gauze, took up a lot of the space. Beyond glass doors and a veranda was the equally fussy garden, horribly green in the sunless oppressive light, where a great many birds were singing competitive nonsense lyrics in the small decorative suburban trees.

Arnold jumped up and began to make for the door, but I stopped him. "She says she doesn't want to be visited again today. She says tomorrow she'll be as usual. She says she'll go to sleep now."

Arnold sat down again. He said, "Yes, better for her to sleep for a while. Oh my God, that's a relief. Let her rest awhile. I expect she'll come down for supper in an hour or two. I'll make her something nice, give her a surprise. God, I do feel relieved."

I felt I ought to check his relief a little. "All the same, it was a very nasty accident." I hoped Arnold had not been making his confession to Francis.

"Yes. But she'll come down, I'm sure she will. She's very buoyant. I'll let her rest now of course. The doctor says it's not--Have a drink, Bradley."

"All's well that ends well," said Arnold. "I'm sorry to have involved you both." No doubt he was sorry. If he had not lost his nerve he could have kept the whole thing secret, he was probably thinking now. However, as Rachel had conjectured, he seemed to have largely recovered his composure. He was sitting very upright, holding his glass carefully in both hands, one leg crossed over the other and a small well-shod foot rhythmically signalling. Everything about Arnold was neat and small, though he was of average height. He had a small well-shaped head, small ears, a small mouth such as a girl would have liked to own, and ridiculously small feet. He had put on his steel-

rimmed glasses and his face had resumed its healthy greasy look. His pointed nose probed the atmosphere, his eyes glinted towards me, diffidently. He had combed his pale lank hair.

Obviously the next thing was to get rid of Francis. Francis had put his macintosh on again, probably out of some instinctive self-defence rather than because of any intention of departing. He was helping himself to more whisky. He had pushed his frizzy hair back behind his ears, and his close dark bear's eyes peered inquisitively at me, at Arnold. He looked pleased with himself. Perhaps the unexpected renewal of his priestly function, however momentary and unimpressive, had cheered him, given him a little whiff of power. His eager interested look and the sudden sickening memory of his news made me feel intense annoyance. I now regretted having let him accompany me. His having met Arnold could have some undesirable consequence. On principle I usually avoid introducing my friends and acquaintances to each other. It is not that one fears treachery, though of course one does. What human fear is deeper? But endless little unnecessary troubles usually result from such introductions. And Francis, though a wreck and not to be accounted a serious danger, had always, with the natural talent for it of a failed person, been a trouble-maker. His gratuitous mission this very day had been typical. I wanted him out of the house. I also wanted to talk to Arnold, who was clearly in a talkative, excited, almost euphoric mood. Perhaps I had been wrong to speak of composure. It was more a matter of shock plus whisky.

Without sitting down I said to Francis. "We needn't keep you now. Thanks for coming."

"Don't go, Doctor," said Arnold. Perhaps he wanted male support, to surround himself with men. Perhaps they had been having an interesting conversation. Arnold had something of the coarseness and the camaraderie of the *homme moyen sensuel*. This too could be a help in marriage. Arnold's glass struck his lower teeth with a slight clack. He had probably drunk a good deal since coming downstairs.

"Good-bye," I said meaningfully to Francis.

"I'm so grateful, Doctor," said Arnold. "Do I owe you anything?"

"You owe him nothing," I said.

Francis looked wistful. He had risen, recognizing the futility of resistance, taking his orders from me.

"About what we were talking about before," he said to me conspiratorially at the door. "When you see Christian--"I won't."

"Anyway, here's my address."

"I won't need it." I led him through the hall. "Goodbye. Thanks." I shut the front door behind him and returned to Arnold. We

sat, both of us crouching a little over the electric fire. I felt very limp and, in a blank sort of way, frightened.

"You are very firm with your friends," said Arnold.

"He's not a friend."

"I thought you said--"Oh never mind him. Do you really think Rachel will come down to supper?"

"Yes, I do. This is just a matter of experience. She never sulks for long after a thing like this, not if I lose my temper. She's kind to me then. It's if I keep quiet she goes on and on. Not that we make a habit of scraps like this. But we sometimes both explode and then it's all over at once, clears the air. We're very close to each other. These rows aren't real warfare, they're an aspect of love. This may be hard for an outsider to understand--"I suppose usually there aren't outsiders around."

"Quite. You do believe me, don't you, Bradley? It's rather important that you should. I'm not just defending myself. It's true. We both shout but there's no real danger. Understand?"

"Yes," I said, reserving my judgment.

"Did she say anything about me?"

Anyway, what did it mean?

"She's such a good person, very forgiving, very kind. I'll leave her be for the moment. She'll soon pity me and come down. We never let the sun go down upon our wrath. It's fake wrath anyway. You do understand, Bradley?"

"Yes."

"Look," said Arnold, "my hand's trembling. Look at the glass shaking about. It's quite involuntary. Isn't that odd?"

"You'd better get your own doctor tomorrow."

"Oh, I think I shall be better tomorrow."

"To see her, you fool."

"Yes, yes, of course. But she's very resilient. Anyway she's not badly hurt, I got that quite clear. Oh thank God, thank God, thank God---I just misunderstood that scene with the poker. She was shamming, furious. I don't blame her. We're a couple of fools. She really isn't badly hurt, Bradley. The doctor explained. Christ, do you think I'm some sort of monster?"

"No. Do you mind if I tidy things up a bit?" I set a stool upright. I began to stoop around the room with a wastepaper basket, picking up broken glass and china, mementoes of the battle which now seemed so unreal, impossible. One casualty was a red-eyed china rabbit which I knew Rachel was very fond of. Who had broken that? Probably Rachel.

"Rachel and I are very happily married," said Arnold.

"Yes, I'm sure." He was probably right. They probably were. I

sat down again, feeling very tired.

"Of course we argue sometimes. Marriage is a long journey at close quarters. Of course nerves get frayed. Every married person is a Jekyll and Hyde, they've got to be. You mayn't think it, but Rachel is a bit of a nagger. Her voice goes on and on and on sometimes. At least it has lately, I suppose it's her age. You wouldn't believe it, but she can go on for an hour saying the same thing over and over again."

"Women like to talk."

"This isn't talk. I mean that she repeats the same sentence over and over and over again."

"You mean literally? She ought to see a psychiatrist."

"What sort of sentence does she repeat, saying what? Give me an example."

"No. You wouldn't understand. It would sound awful when it isn't. She gets an idea and runs it for a while. For instance that I discuss her, with other women."

"You're not sort of--Are you?"

"You mean running around? No, of course not. Christ, I'm a model husband. Rachel knows that perfectly well. I always tell her the truth, she knows I don't have affairs. Well, I have had, but I told her, and that was ages ago. Why shouldn't I talk to other women, we're not Victorians! I have to have friends and talk freely to them, I can't give way on a point like that. And where it would make one mad with resentment one mustn't give way, one oughtn't to. Anyway she doesn't really expect it, it's all dotty. Why shouldn't I talk about her sometimes? It would look jolly funny if she was a banned subject. It's always open kind sympathetic talk, I wouldn't say anything I wouldn't want her to hear. I don't mind her talking about me to her friends. Christ, one isn't sacred, and of course she does talk, she has lots of friends, she's not cloistered. She says she's wasted her talents, but that's not true, there are hundreds of kinds of self-expression, one doesn't have to be a bloody artist. She's intelligent, she could have been a secretary or something if she'd wanted to, but does she really want that? Of course not. It's a sort of empty complaint, and she knows it, it's just a kind of momentary annoyance with me. She does all sorts of interesting things, she's on endless committees, involved in campaigns for this and that, she knows all sorts of people, Members of Parliament, far grander people than me! She's not a frustrated person--"It's just a mood," I said. "Women have moods." The agonized voice I had heard upstairs already seemed remote. Then it occurred to me that I was doing just what she had predicted.

There was the sound of a lavatory flushing upstairs. Arnold moved to rise, then fell back. He said, "There you are. She'll be down. I won't bother her just yet. I'm sorry I troubled you, Bradley, there was

no reason, I just stupidly panicked."

I thought, He will soon feel resentment against me because of this. I said, "Naturally I won't mention this business to anyone."

Arnold, looking a little annoyed, said, "Do what you like. I'm not asking you to be discreet. More sherry? Why did you chuck that doctor chap out so, if I may say so, churlishly?"

"I wanted to talk to you."

"What was all that he was saying to you just at the end?"

"Oh, nothing."

"He said something about 'Christian.' Was he talking about your ex-wife? Wasn't that her name? Pity I never met her, but you got rid of her so early on."

"I'd better go. Rachel will be coming down for the reconciliation scene."

"Not for another hour, I reckon."

"I suppose that's one of those skilled inductions you married people live by. All the same--"Don't be evasive, Bradley. Was he talking about your once wife?"

"Yes. He's her brother."

"Really? Your ex-wife's brother. How fascinating. I wish I'd known, I'd have looked him over more carefully. Are you being reconciled or something?"

"No."

"Oh come on, something's happening."

"You love happenings, don't you. She's coming back to London. She's a widow now. It's nothing to do with me."

"Why not? Aren't you going to see her?"

"Why the hell should I? I don't like her."

"You are picturesque, Bradley. And so dignified! After all these years. I'd be dying with curiosity. I must say, I'd love to meet your ex-wife. I can never quite see you as a married man."

"Me neither."

"What do you mean? You said he was."

"He was struck off the register."

"Ex-wife, ex-doctor. How interesting. What was he struck off for?"

"I don't know. Something to do with drugs."

"But what to do with drugs? What did he do exactly?"

"I don't know!" I said, beginning to be exasperated in a familiar way. "I'm not interested. I never liked him. He's some sort of scoundrel. By the way, I hope to God you didn't talk to him about what really happened tonight. I just told him there'd been an accident."

"Well, what really happened wasn't very--I dare say he

guessed--"I hope not! He's capable of blackmailing you."

"That man? Oh no!"

"Anyway, he disappeared out of my life long ago, thank God."

"But now he's back. Bradley, you are censorious, you know."

"I disapprove of some things, oddly enough."

"Disapproving of things is all right. But you mustn't disapprove of people. It cuts you off."

"I want to be cut off from people like Marloe. Being a real person oneself is a matter of setting up limits and drawing lines and saying no. I don't want to be a nebulous bit of ectoplasm straying around in other people's lives. That sort of vague sympathy with everybody precludes any real understanding of anybody."

"The sympathy needn't be vague--"And it precludes any real loyalty to anybody."

"One must know the details, justice, after all--"

"I detest chatter and gossip. One must hold one's tongue. Even sometimes just not think about people. Real thoughts come out of silence."

"Bradley, not that, please. Listen! I was saying justice demands details. You say you aren't interested in why he was struck off the register. You ought to be! You say he's some sort of scoundrel. I'd like to be told what sort. You obviously don't know."

Making a strong effort to check my exasperation I said, "I was glad to get rid of my wife and he went too. Can't you understand that? It seems simple enough to me."

"I rather liked him. I asked him to come and see us."

"Oh Christ!"

"I don't think curiosity is a kind of charity. I think it's a kind of malice."

"That's what makes a writer, knowing the details."

"It may make your kind of writer. It doesn't make mine."

"Here we go again," said Arnold.

"Why pile up a jumble of 'details'? When you start really imagining something you have to forget the details anyhow, they just get in the way. Art isn't the reproduction of oddments out of life."

"I never said it was!" said Arnold. "I don't draw direct from life."

"Your wife thinks you do."

"Oh that. Oh God."

"Inquisitive chatter and cataloguing of things one's spotted isn't art."

"Of course it isn't--"Vague romantic myth isn't art either. Art is imagination. Imagination changes, fuses. Without imagination you have stupid details on one side and empty dreams on the other."

"Bradley, I know you--"Art isn't chat plus fantasy. Art comes out of endless restraint and silence."

"If the silence is endless there isn't any art! It's people without creative gifts who say that more means worse!"

"One should only complete something when one feels one's bloody privileged to have it at all. Those who only do what's easy will never be rewarded by--"Nonsense. I write whether I feel like it or not. I complete things whether I think they're perfect or not. Anything else is hypocrisy. I have no muse. That's what being a professional writer is."

"Then thank God I'm not one."

"You're such an agonizer, Bradley. You romanticize art. You're a masochist about it, you want to suffer, you want to feel that your inability to create is continuously significant."

"It is continuously significant."

"Oh come, be humbler, let cheerfulness break in! I can't think why you worry so. Thinking of yourself as a 'writer' is part of your trouble. Why not just think of yourself as someone who very occasionally writes something, who may in the future write something? Why make a life drama out of it?"

"I don't think of myself as a writer, not like that. I know you do. You're all 'writer.' I don't see myself in that way. I think of myself as an artist, that is, as a dedicated person. And of course it's a life drama. Are you suggesting that I'm some sort of amateur?"

"No, no--"Because if you are--"Bradley, please let's not have this silly old quarrel again, I don't feel strong enough."

"All right. Sorry. Sorry."

"You get so worked up and flowery! You sound as if you were quoting something all the time!"

I felt a sizzling warmth in my coat pocket wherein I had thrust the folded manuscript of my review of Arnold's novel. Arnold Baffin's work was a congeries of amusing anecdotes loosely garbled into "racy stories" with the help of half-baked unmeditated symbolism. The dark powers of imagination were conspicuous by their absence. Arnold Baffin wrote too much, too fast. Arnold Baffin was really just a talented journalist.

"Let's start up our Sundays again," said Arnold. "I so much enjoyed our talks. We must just keep out of those old rat runs. We're both like mechanical toys when certain subjects are mentioned, we go whirring off. Come to lunch next Sunday, why not?"

"I doubt if Rachel will want to see me next Sunday."

"Why ever not?"

"Anyway I'm going abroad."

"Of course, I'd forgotten. Where are you going to?"

"Italy. I haven't made detailed plans yet."

"Well, you aren't going at once, are you? Come next Sunday. And let us know where you'll be in Italy. We're going there too, we might meet."

"I'll ring up. Better go now, Arnold."

"All right. Thanks. And don't worry about us. You know."

He seemed ready to let me go now. In fact we were both of us exhausted.

He waved me off and closed the door quickly. By the time I reached the front gate I could hear his gramophone. He must have hared straight back into the drawing-room and put on a record, like a man racing for his fix. It sounded like Stravinsky or something. The action and the sound set my teeth on edge. I am, I fear, one of those who, according to Shakespeare, are "fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils."

It was now, I was surprised to see from my watch, nearly eight o'clock in the evening. The sun was shining again, though a part of the sky was covered with dark metallic cloud which had been drawn across it like a curtain. There was a rather lurid light, such as these early summer evenings can produce, when a clear but strengthless sun shines at the approach of night. I noticed green leaves in the suburban gardens outlined with an awful clarity. The feathered songsters were still pouring forth their nonsense.

I felt very tired and a little muzzy and weak at the knees with fear and shock. A mixture of emotions raged. Partly, I still felt something of the sheer unholy excitement which I had experienced initially at the thought of a friend (especially this one) in trouble. I felt too that, as far as the trouble was concerned, I had acquitted myself quite well. However it was also possible that I might have to pay the penalty for this. Both Arnold and Rachel might resent my role and wish to punish me for it. This was a particularly irritating anxiety to develop just as I was proposing to go away and forget all about Arnold for a time. It was alarming to find myself suddenly so bound up by exasperation, irritation, affection. I resented and feared these ligatures. I wondered if I should not now delay my departure until after Sunday. On Sunday I could test the atmosphere, estimate the damage, make some sort of peace. Then I could depart in a suitable state of indifference. That they would both resent me as a witness seemed inevitable. However in so far as they were both decent rational people I could expect from them a conscious effort to inhibit resentment. This seemed a reason to see them again soon so as to allow them to make their effort before the thing became historically fixed. On the other hand I had, in that lurid evening light, a superstitious feeling that if I did not make my escape before Sunday

something would grab me. I even wondered if I should take a taxi (one passed me at that moment), go back to my flat, pick up my luggage, and go straight on to the station, catching whatever train I could, even if it meant waiting there until the following morning. But this was obviously an absurd idea.

I then began to wonder what on earth was happening now back at the Baffins' house? Was Rachel still lying like a disfigured corpse staring at the ceiling, while Arnold sat in the drawing-room drinking whisky and listening to *The Fire Bird*? Perhaps Rachel had drawn the sheet over her face again in that appalling way. Or was it all quite different? Arnold was kneeling outside the door begging her to let him in, weeping and accusing himself. Or else, Rachel, who had been listening for my departure, had come quietly down the stairs and into her husband's arms. Perhaps now they were in the kitchen together, cooking the supper and opening a special bottle of wine to celebrate. What a mystery a marriage was. What a strange and violent world, the world of matrimony. I was glad to be outside it. The idea of it filled me with a sort of queasy pity. I felt at that moment so "curious," in just Arnold's sense of the word, that I almost turned back to snoop around the house and find out what had happened. But of course such an action was not in my character.

I had crossed the main road and entered the little shopping street that led to the station. The evening had darkened though the pale lurid sun was still shining. Some of the shops had switched their lights on. There was a shadowy light, not exactly twilight, but an uncertain vivid yet hazy illumination, wherein people walked like spirits, bathed in light and not revealed. The rather dream-like atmosphere was intensified, I suppose, by my own tiredness, by having drunk alcohol, by having eaten nothing. In this mood of rather doom-ridden spiritual lassitude I noticed with only a little surprise and interest the figure upon the other side of the road of a young man who was behaving rather oddly. He was standing upon the kerb and strewing flowers upon the roadway, as if casting them into a river. My first thought was that he was the adherent of some Hindu sect, not then uncommon in London, and that he was performing some religious rite. A few people paused to look at him, but Londoners were by now so accustomed to "weirdies" of all kinds that his ritual aroused little interest.

The young fellow appeared to be chanting some sort of repetitive litany. I now saw that what he was strewing was not so much flowers as white petals. Where had I seen just such petals lately? The fragments of white paint which the violence of Arnold's chisel had dislodged from the bedroom door. And the white petals were being cast, not at random, but in relation to the regular and constant

passage of motor-cars. As a car approached the young chap would take a handful of petals out of a bag and cast them into the path of the car, uttering the while his rhythmic chant. Then the frail whitenesses would race about, caught in the car's motion, dash madly under the wheels, follow the whirlwind of the car's wake, and dissipate themselves farther along the road: so that the casting away of the petals seemed like a sacrifice or act of destruction, since that which was offered was being so instantly consumed and made to vanish.

I describe Julian here as teen-age because that was how I still thought of her, though at this period she was, I suppose, in her earliest twenties. Arnold had been a young father. I had felt a modest avuncular interest in the fairy-like little girl. (I had never wanted children of my own. Many artists do not.) With the approach of puberty however she lost her looks and developed an awkward sulky aggressive attitude to the world in general which considerably diminished her charm. She was always fretting and complaining, and her little face, as it hardened into adult lines, grew discontented and secretive. That was as I recalled her. I had not in fact seen her for some while. Her parents adored her, yet were at the same time disappointed in her. They had wanted a boy. They had both assumed, as parents do, that Julian would be clever, but this appeared not to be the case. Julian took a long time growing up, she took little part in the self-conscious tribalism of the "teen-age" world, and still preferred dressing her dolls to dressing herself at an age when most girls are beginning, even pardonably, to interest themselves in war paint.

Not notably successful in exams and certainly not in the least bookish, Julian had left school at sixteen. She had spent a year in France, more at Arnold's insistence than out of her own sense of adventure, or so it had seemed to me at the time. She returned from France unimpressed by that country and speaking very bad French which she promptly forgot, and went on to a typists' training course. Fledged as a typist she took a job in the "typing pool" at a Government office. When she was about nineteen she decided that she was a painter, and Arnold eagerly wangled her into an art school, which she left after a year. After that she had entered a teachers' training college somewhere in the Midlands where she had been, I think, for a year or perhaps two when I saw her on that evening strewing the white petals in the path of the oncoming motorcars.

"Hello, Bradley."

Owing to her absence at college and the demise of our Sundays I had not seen Julian for nearly a year, and before that indeed infrequently. I found her older, the face still sulky but with more of a brooding expression, suggestive of the occurrence of thought. She had a rather bad complexion, or perhaps it was just that

Arnold's "greasy" look looked less healthy on a woman. She never used make-up. She had watery-blue eyes, not the flecked hazel-brown of her mother's, nor did her secretive and dog-like face repeat Rachel's large bland freckled features. Her thick undulating mane, which had no trace of red, was streakily fair with that dark blond colour which is almost suggestive of green. Even at close quarters she still slightly resembled a boy, tallish, dour, who had just cut himself in a premature attempt to shave his first whisker. I did not mind the dourness. I dislike girls who are skittish.

"Hello, Julian. Whatever are you doing?"

"Have you been to see Daddy?"

"Yes." I reflected that it was just as well Julian was out this evening.

"Good. I thought you'd quarrelled."

"Certainly not!"

"You don't come any more."

"I do. Only you're away."

"Not now. I'm doing teaching practice in London. What was happening when you left?"

"Where? At home? Oh--nothing special--"They were quarrelling so I left the house. Have they calmed town?"

"Yes, of course--"Don't you think they quarrel more than they used to?"

"No, I--How smart you are, Julian. Quite a dandy."

"It's an exorcism. These are love letters."

"Love letters?"

"From my ex-boy friend."

I remembered that Arnold had mentioned rather unenthusiastically a "hairy swain," an art student or something.

"Have you parted company?"

"Yes. I've torn them into the smallest possible pieces. When I've got rid of them all I'll be free. Here goes the last, I think."

Taking from her neck the receptacle rather like a nose-bag which had contained the dismembered missives she turned it inside out. A few more white petals flew with the passing wind and were gone.

"But what were you saying, you were chanting something, a spell or such."

" 'Oscar Belling.' " ° "What?"

"That was his name. Look, I'm using the past tense! It's all over!

"Did you abandon him or did he--?"

"I'd rather not talk about it. Bradley, I wanted to ask you something."

It was quite dark now, a bluish night gauzed over by the yellow street lamps, and reminding me irrelevantly of Rachel's reddish golden hair adhering to the front of Francis's shabby blue suit. We walked slowly along the street.

"Look, Bradley, it's this. I've decided to be a writer."

My heart sank. "That's fine."

"And I want you to help me."

"It's not easy to help someone to be a writer, it may not even be possible."

"The thing is, I don't want to be a writer like Daddy, I want to be a writer like you."

My heart warmed to the girl. But my answer had to be ironical. "My dear Julian, don't emulate me! I constantly try and hardly ever succeed!"

"That's just it. Daddy writes too much, don't you think? He hardly ever revises. He writes something, then he 'gets rid of it' by publishing it, I've heard him actually say that, and then he writes something else. He's always in such a hurry, it's neurotic. I see no point in being an artist unless you try all the time to be perfect."

I wondered if these were the views of the late Oscar Belling. "It's a long hard road, Julian, if that's what you believe."

"Well, it's what you believe, and I admire you for it, I've always admired you, Bradley. But the point is this, will you teach me?"

My heart sank again. "What do you mean, Julian?"

"Two things really. I've been thinking about it. I know I'm not educated and I know I'm immature. And this teachers' training place is hopeless. I want you to give me a reading list. All the great books I ought to read, but only the great ones and the hard ones. I don't want to waste my time with small stuff. I haven't got much time left now. And I'll read the books and we could discuss them. You could give me sort of tutorials on them. And then, the second thing, I'd like to write things for you, short stories perhaps, or anything you felt I should write, and you'd criticize what I'd written. You see, I want to be really taken in hand. I think one should pay so much attention to technique, don't you? Like learning to draw before you paint. Do please say you'll take me on. It needn't take much of your time, not more than a couple of hours or so in a week, and it would absolutely change my life."

I knew of course that it was just a matter of choosing a way of getting out of this gracefully. Julian was already grieving over the wasted years and regretting that she had not much time left. My grief and my regret were a rather different matter. I could not spare her a couple of hours a week. How dare she ask for my precious hours? In any case, the child's suggestion appalled and embarrassed me. It was

not just the display of youthful insensibility. It was the sadly misplaced nature of her ambition. There was little doubt that Julian's fate was to be typist, teacher, housewife, without starring in any role.

I said, "I think it's a very good idea and of course I'd like to help, and I do so agree with you about technique--Only just now I'm going to be abroad for a while."

"Oh, where? I could visit you. I'm quite free now because my school has measles."

"I shall be travelling."

"Oh Iliad, Divine Comedy, please. That's marvellous! That's just it! The big stuff!"

"And you don't mind poetry, prose--?"

"Oh no, not poetry. I can't read poetry very well. I'm keeping poetry for later on."

"The Iliad and the Divine Comedy are poems."

"Well, yes, of course they are, but I'd be reading them in a prose translation."

"So that disposes of that difficulty."

"You will write to me then, Bradley? I'm so terribly grateful. I'll say good-bye to you here because I must just look in this shop."

We had stopped rather abruptly a little short of the station outside the illuminated window of a shoe shop. High summer boots of various colours made out of a sort of lace occupied the front of the window. Slightly put out by the brusqueness of my dismissal I could not think of anything suitable to say. I saluted vaguely and said, "Ta-ta," an expression which I do not think I have ever used before or since.

"Ta-ta," said Julian, as if this were a sort of code. Then she turned to face the lighted window and began examining the boots.

I crossed the road and reached the station entrance and looked back. She was leaning forward now with her hands on her knees, her thick hair and her brow and nose goldened by the bright light. I thought how aptly some painter, not Mr. Belling, could have used her as a model for an allegory of Vanity. I watched, as one might watch a fox, for some minutes, but she did not go away or even move.

Yes, it was time to move. I had felt, during recent months, sometimes boredom, sometimes despair, as I struggled with a nebulous work which seemed now a nouvelle, now a vast novel, wherein a hero not unlike myself pursued, amid ghostly incidents, a series of reflections about life and art. The trouble was that the dark blaze, whose absence I had deplored in Arnold's work, was absent here as well. I could not fire and fuse these thoughts, these people, into a whole thing. I wanted to produce a sort of statement which

might be called my philosophy. But I also wanted to embody this in a story, perhaps in an allegory, something with a form as pliant and as hard as my cast-iron garland of roses. But I could not do it. My people were shadows, my thoughts were epigrams. However I felt, as we artists can feel, the proximity of enlightenment. And I was sure that if I went away now into loneliness, right away from the associations of tedium and failure, I would soon be rewarded. So it was in this mood that I decided to set forth, leaving my darling burrow for a countryside which I had never visited, and a cottage which I had never seen.

I also write to ask you, as briefly as possible, a favour. You were of course interested to meet Francis Marloe, who by the weirdest accident was with me when you telephoned. You spoke of meeting him again. Please do not do so. If you reflect you will see how hurtful to me any such association would be. I do not propose to have anything to do with my former wife and I do not want any connection to exist between her world, whatever that may turn out to be, and the things of my own which are dear to me. It would of course be characteristic of you to feel "interested" in probing in this region, but please be kind enough to an old friend not to do so.

Let me take this chance to say that in spite of all differences our friendship is very precious to me. As you will remember, I have made you my literary executor. Could there be a greater sign of trust? However, let us hope that talk of wills is premature. I am just now leaving London and will be away for some time. I hope I shall be able to write. I feel that a most crucial period in my life lies ahead. Give my fondest love to Rachel. I thank you both for your consistent cordiality to a solitary man; and I rely upon you absolutely in the matter of F. M.

Refilling my pen, I began to write another letter, which ran as follows: My dear Julian, it was kind of you to ask my advice about books and writing. I am afraid I cannot offer to teach you to write. I have not the time, and such teaching is, I surmise, impossible anyway. Let me just say a word about books. I think you should read the Iliad and the Odyssey in any unvarnished translation. (If pressed for time, omit the Odyssey.) These are the greatest literary works in the world, where huge conceptions are refined into simplicity. I think perhaps you should leave Dante until later. The Commedia presents many points of difficulty and needs, as Homer does not, a commentary. In fact, if not read in Italian, this great work seems not only incomprehensible, but repulsive. You should, I feel, relax your embargo upon poetry sufficiently to accommodate the better known plays of Shakespeare! How fortunate we are to have English as our native tongue! Familiarity and excitement should carry you easily

through these works. Forget that they are "poetry" and just enjoy them. The rest of my reading list consists simply of the greatest English and Russian novels of the nineteenth century. (If you are not sure which these are, ask your father: I think he can be trusted to tell you!)

My very good wishes to you, and thank you for wanting to know what I thought!

Yours,
Bradley

After I had finished this letter and after some reflection and fumbling and excursions to the chimney piece and the display cabinet, I began a further letter which went thus: Dear Marloe, as I hope I made clear to you, your visit was not only unwelcome but entirely without point, since I do not propose under any circumstances to communicate with my former wife. Any further attempt at an approach, whether by letter or in person, will be met by absolute rejection. However, now that you appreciate my attitude I imagine that you will be kind and wise enough to leave me alone. I was grateful for your help chez Mr. and Mrs. Baffin. I should tell you, in case you had any thought of pursuing an acquaintance with them, that I have asked them not to receive you, and they will not receive you.

Yours sincerely,
Bradley Pearson

Francis had, on his departure on the previous evening, contrived to thrust into my pocket his address and telephone number written upon a slip of paper. I copied the address onto the envelope and threw the paper into the wastepaper basket.

I then sat and twiddled for a bit longer, watching the creeping line of sun turning the crusty surface of the wall opposite from brown to blond. Then I fell to writing again.

Yours sincerely,
Bradley Pearson

PS. I should add that I am today leaving London and tomorrow leaving England. I shall be staying away for some time and may even settle abroad.

When I had finished writing this letter I was not only sweating, I was trembling and panting and my heart was beating

viciously. What emotion had so invaded me? Fear? It is sometimes curiously difficult to name the emotion from which one suffers. The naming of it is sometimes unimportant, sometimes crucial. Hatred?

I looked at my watch and found that in the composition of the letter a long time had passed. It was now too late to catch the morning train. No doubt the afternoon train would be better in any case. Trains induce such terrible anxiety. They image the possibility of total and irrevocable failure. They are also dirty, racketty, packed with strangers, an object lesson in the foul contingency of life: the talkative fellow-traveller, the possibility of children.

I decided that I would send off the letter to Francis and postpone deciding what sort of communication, if any, to send to Christian. I also decided that it was now a matter of urgency to get out of the house and down to the station, where I could have lunch and await the afternoon train at leisure. It was just as well the earlier train had been safely missed. I have sometimes had the unpleasant experience, arriving very early for a train, of finding myself catching its predecessor with a minute to spare. Thrusting the letter to Christian into my pocket I found my fingers touching the review of Arnold's novel. Here was another unsolved problem. Although I was well able to consider refraining from doing so, I knew that I also felt very anxious to publish. Why? Yes, I must get away and think all these matters out.

My suitcases were in the hall where I had left them yesterday. I put on my macintosh. I went into the bathroom. This bathroom was of the kind which no amount of caring for could make other than sordid. Vari-coloured slivers of soap, such as I cannot normally bear to throw away, were lying about in the basin and in the bath. With a sudden act of will I collected them all and flushed them down the lavatory. As I stood there, dazed with this success, the front doorbell suddenly began to ring and ring. part one 45 1 At this point it is necessary for me to give some account of my sister, Priscilla, who is about to appear upon the scene.

Priscilla is six years younger than me. She left school early. So indeed did I. I am an educated and cultivated person through my own zeal, efforts and talents. Priscilla had no zeal and talents and made no efforts. She was spoilt by my mother whom she resembled. I think women, perhaps unconsciously, convey to female children a deep sense of their own discontent. My mother, though not too unhappily married, had a continued grudge against the world. This may have originated in, or been aggravated by, a sense of having married "beneath" her, though not exactly in a social sense. My mother had been a "beauty" and had had many suitors. I suspect she felt later in life, as she grew old behind the counter, that if she had

played her cards otherwise she could have made a much better bargain in life. Priscilla, though she made in commercial and even in social terms a more advantageous buy, followed somewhat the same pattern. Priscilla, though not as pretty as my mother, had been a good-looking girl, and was admired in the circle of pert half-baked undereducated youths who constituted her "social life." But Priscilla, egged on by her mother, had ambitions, and was in no hurry to settle with one of these unprepossessing candidates.

To cut a long story short, Priscilla really got quite "above herself," dressing and behaving "grandly," and did eventually satisfy her ambition of penetrating into some slightly "better" social circles than those which she had frequented at first. I suspect that she and my mother actually planned a "campaign" to better Priscilla's lot. Priscilla went to tennis parties, indulged in amateur dramatics, went to charity dances. She and my mother invented for her quite a little "season." Only Priscilla's season went on and on. She could not make up her mind to marry. Or perhaps her present beaux, in spite of the bold face which Priscilla and my mother jointly presented to the world, felt that after all poor Priscilla was not a very good match. Perhaps there was after all a smell of shop. Then, doubtless as a result of working so hard on her season, she lost her job, and made no attempt to obtain another. She stayed at home, fell vaguely ill, and had what would now, I suppose, be called a nervous breakdown.

By the time she recovered she was getting on into her twenties and had lost some of her first good looks. She talked at that time of becoming a "model" (a "mannequin"), but so far as I know made no serious attempt to do so. What she did become, virtually, and not to put too fine a point upon it, was a tart. I do not mean that she stood around in the road, but she moved in a world of business men, golf-club bar proppers and night-club hounds, who certainly regarded her in this light. I did not want to know anything about this; possibly I ought to have been more concerned. I was upset and annoyed when my father once approached the subject, and although I could see that he had been made utterly miserable, I resolutely refused to discuss it. I never said anything to my mother, who always defended Priscilla and pretended, or deceived herself into believing, that all was well. I was by this time already involved with Christian, and I had other matters on my mind.

I will not attempt a lengthy description of Roger. He too will appear in the story in due course. I did not like Roger. Roger did not like me. He always referred to himself as a "public-school boy," which I suppose he had been. He had a little education, and a great deal of "air," a "plummy" voice and a misleadingly distinguished appearance. As his copious crown of hair became peppery and then grey he began

to resemble a soldier. (He had once done some army service, I think in the Pay Corps.) He held himself like a military man and alleged that his friends nicknamed him "the brigadier." He cultivated the crude joking manners of a junior officers' mess. He worked in fact in a bank, about which he made as much mystery as possible. He drank and laughed too much.

Married to such a man it was not likely that my sister would be very happy, nor was she. With a pathetic and touching loyalty, and even courage, she kept up appearances. She was house-proud: and there was eventually quite a handsome house, or "maisonette," in the "better part" of Bristol, with fine cutlery and glasses and the things which women prize. There were "dinner parties" and a big car. It was a long way from Croydon. I suspected that they lived beyond their means and that Roger was often in financial difficulties, but Priscilla never actually said so. They both very much wanted children, but were unable to produce any. Once when drunk Roger hinted that Priscilla's "operation" had done some fatal damage. I did not want to know. I could see that Priscilla was unhappy, her life was boring and empty, and Roger was not a rewarding companion. I did not however want to know about this either. I rarely visited them. I occasionally gave Priscilla lunch in London. We talked of trivialities.

She was smartly dressed in a navy-blue "jersey" coat and skirt, looking pale and tense, unsmiling. She had retained her looks into middle age, though she had put on weight and looked a good deal less "glossy," now resembling a "career woman": the female counterpart perhaps of Roger's specious "military look." Her well-cut un-gaudy clothes, deliberately "classic" and quite unlike the lurid plumage of her youth, looked a bit like uniform, the effect being counteracted however by the vulgar "costume jewellery" with which she always loaded herself. She dyed her hair a discreet gold and wore it kempt and wavy. Her face was not a weak one, somewhat resembling mine only without the "cagey" sensitive look. Her eyes were narrowed by short sight, and her thin lips were brightly painted.

She said nothing in reply to my surprised greeting, marched past me into the sitting-room, selected one of the lyre-back chairs, pulled it away from the wall, sat down upon it and dissolved into desperate tears.

"Priscilla, Priscilla, what is it, what's happened? Oh, you are upsetting me so!"

After a while the weeping subsided into a series of long sighing sobs. She sat inspecting the streaks of honey-brown make-up which had come off onto her paper handkerchief. iT-> -111.. -"

Priscilla, what is it?

"I've left Roger."

I felt blank dismay, instant fear for myself. I did not want to be involved in any mess of Priscilla's. I did not even want to have to be sorry for Priscilla. Then I thought, Of course there is exaggeration, misconception.

"Don't be silly, Priscilla. Now do calm yourself, please. Of course you haven't left Roger. You've had a tiff--"Could I have some whisky?"

"I don't keep whisky. I think there's a little medium-sweet sherry."

"Well, can I have some?"

I went to the walnut hanging cupboard and poured her a glass of brown sherry. "Here."

"To bed?"

She got up abruptly, pushed out of the door, banging herself against the lintel, and went into the spare bedroom. She came out again, cannoning into me, when she saw that the bed was not made up. She went into my bedroom, sat on the bed, threw her handbag violently into a corner, kicked off her shoes and dragged off her jacket. Uttering a low moan she began to undo her skirt.

"Priscilla!"

"I'm going to lie down. I've been up all night. Could you bring my glass of sherry please?"

I fetched it.

Priscilla got her skirt off, seemingly tearing it in the process. With a flash of pink petticoat she got herself between the sheets and lay there shuddering, staring in front of her with big blank suffering eyes.

I pulled up a chair and sat down beside her.

"Bradley, my marriage is over. I think my life is probably over. What a poor affair it has been."

"Priscilla, don't talk so--"Roger has become a devil. Some sort of devil. Or else he's mad."

"You know I never thought much of Roger--"I've been so unhappy for years, so unhappy--"I don't understand how a human being can be so unhappy all the time and still be alive."

"But lately it's been sort of pure intense hell, he's been sort of willing my death, oh I can't explain, and he tried to poison me and I woke in the night and he was standing by my bed looking so terrible as if he was just making up his mind to strangle me."

"How can you say that to me, how can you. This cold hatred and wanting to kill me and poison me--"Priscilla, calm yourself. You can't leave Roger. It doesn't make sense. Of course you're unhappy, all married people are unhappy, but you can't just launch yourself on the world at fifty whatever you are now--"

"Fifty-two. Oh God, oh God--"

"Stop it. Stop that noise, please. Now dry yourself up and I'll take you back to Paddington in a taxi. I'm going to the country. You can't stay here."

"And I left all my jewels behind and some of them are quite valuable, and now he won't let me have them out of spite. Oh why was I such a fool! I just ran out of the house late last night, we'd been quarrelling for hours and hours and I couldn't stand it any more. I just ran out, I didn't even take my coat, and I went to the station and I thought he'd come after me to the station, but he didn't. Of course he's been trying to drive me to run away and then say it's my fault. And I waited at the station for hours and it was so cold and I felt as if I was going mad through sheer misery. Oh he's been so awful to me, so vile and frightening--Sometimes he'd just go on and on and on saying, 'I hate you, I hate you, I hate you--"All spouses are murmuring that to each other all the time. It's the fundamental litany of marriage.'"

'I hate you, I hate you-'"

"I think you were saying that, Priscilla, not him. I think--"And I left all my jewels behind and my mink stole, and Roger took all the money out of our joint account--"Priscilla, brace up. Look, I'll give you ten minutes. Just rest quietly, and then put your togs on again and we'll leave together."

"Bradley--oh my God I'm so wretched, I'm choking with it--I made a home for him--I haven't got anything else--I cared so much about that house, I made all the curtains myself--I loved all the little things--I hadn't anything else to love--and now it's all gone--all my life has been taken away from me--I'll destroy myself--I'll tear myself to pieces--"

"I'll destroy myself."

"Now make an effort. Get control of yourself. I'm not being heartless. It's for your good. I'll leave you now and finish packing my own bags."

She was sobbing again, not touching her face, letting the tears flow down. She looked so pitiful and ugly, I reached across and pulled the curtain a little. Her swollen face, the scene in the dim light, reminded me of Rachel.

"Oh I left all my jewels behind, my diamante set and my jade brooch and my amber ear-rings and the little rings, and my crystal-and-lapis necklace, and my mink stole--I closed the door and went back to the sitting-room and closed the sitting-room door. I felt very shaken. I cannot stand unbridled displays of emotion and women's stupid tears. And I was suddenly deeply frightened by the possibility of having my sister on my hands. I simply did not love her enough to be of any use to her, and it seemed wiser to make this plain at once.

I waited for about ten minutes, trying to calm and clear my mind, and then went back to the bedroom door. I did not really expect that Priscilla would have got dressed and be ready to leave. I did not know what to do. I felt fear and disgust at the idea of "mental breakdown," the semi-deliberate refusal to go on organizing one's life which is regarded with such tolerance in these days. I peered into the room. Priscilla was lying in a sort of abandoned attitude on her side, having half kicked off the bedclothes. Her mouth was wet and wide open. A plump stockingled leg stuck rather awkwardly out of the bed, surmounted by yellowish suspenders and a piece of mottled thigh. The graceless awkwardness of the position suggested a dummy which had fallen over. She said in a heavy slightly whimpering voice, "I've just eaten all my sleeping pills."

"What! Priscilla! No!"

"I've eaten them." She was holding an empty bottle in her hand.

"You're not serious! How many?"

I picked it up. The label meant nothing to me. I made a sort of dart at Priscilla, trying stupidly to pull the bedclothes up over her, but one of her legs was on top of them. I ran out of the room.

In the hall I ran to and fro, starting off back to the bedroom, then running towards the flat door, then back to the telephone. As I reached the telephone it began to ring, and I picked it up.

There were the rapid pips of the "pay tone," and then a click--Arnold's voice said, "Bradley, Rachel and I are just in town for lunch, we're just round the corner and we wondered if we could persuade you to join us. Darling, would you like to talk to Bradley?"

Rachel's voice said, "Bradley, my dear, we both felt--I said, "Priscilla's just eaten all her sleeping pills."

"What? Who?"

"Priscilla. My sister, just taken bottle sleeping pills--I--get hospital--"

"What's that, Bradley? I can't hear. Bradley, don't ring off, we--"Priscilla's taken her sleeping--Sorry, I must ring--get doctor--sorry, sorry--I jammed the phone down, then lifted it again and could still hear Rachel's voice saying, "anything we can do--" I banged it back, ran to the bedroom door, ran back again, lifted the phone, put it down, began to pull the telephone books out of the shelves where they live inside a converted mahogany commode. The telephone books slewed all over the floor. The front doorbell rang.

I ran to the door and opened it. It was Francis Marloe.

I said, "Thank God you've come, my sister has just eaten a bottle full of sleeping pills."

"Where's the bottle?" said Francis. "How many were in it?"

"God, how do I know--The bottle--God, I had it in my hand a moment ago--Christ, where is it?"

"When did she take them?"

"Just now."

"Have you telephoned a hospital?"

"No, I--"

"Where is she?"

"Oh Christ, where is the bloody bottle--I had it in my hand--The doorbell rang again. I opened it. Arnold, Rachel and Julian were standing outside the door. They were neat and smartly dressed, Julian in a sort of flowered smock looking about twelve. They appeared like a family advertising corn flakes or insurance, except that Rachel had a bruise under one eye.

"Bradley, can we--"Help me find the bottle, I had the bottle she took, I put it down somewhere--A cry came out of the bedroom. Francis called, "Brad, could--Rachel said, "Let me." She went into the bedroom.

"I must telephone the hospital," I said.

"What's this about a bottle?" said Arnold.

"I can't read the blasted telephone number. Can you read the number?"

"I always said you needed glasses."

Rachel ran out of the bedroom into the kitchen. I could hear Priscilla's voice saying, "Leave me alone, leave me alone."

"Arnold, could you telephone the hospital and I'll look for the--I must have taken it into the--I ran into the sitting-room and was surprised to see a girl there. I got an impression of freshly laundered dress, freshly laundered girl, girl on a visit. She was examining the little bronzes in the lacquered display cabinet. She stopped doing this and watched me with polite curiosity while I started hurling cushions about. "What are you looking for, Bradley?"

"Bottle. Sleeping pills. See what kind."

Arnold was telephoning.

Francis called out. I ran to the bedroom. Rachel was mopping the floor. There was a vile smell. Priscilla was sitting on the side of the bed sobbing. Her petticoat with pink daisies on it was hitched up round her waist, rather tight silken knickers cut into her thigh, making the mottled flesh bulge.

Francis, talking quickly, excitedly, said, "She was sick--I didn't really--it'll help--but a stomach pump--Julian said, "Is this it?" Without entering she thrust a hand round the door.

Francis took the bottle. "Oh that stuff--That's not--"Ambulance coming," called Arnold.

"She can't do herself much harm with that. Need to take an

awful lot. It makes one sick actually, that was why--"Priscilla, do stop crying. You'll be all right."

"Leave me alone!"

"Keep her warm," said Francis.

"Leave me alone, I hate you all."

"She isn't herself," I said.

"Get her into bed properly, snuggle down a bit," said Francis.

"I'll make some tea," said Rachel.

They retired and the door shut. I tried again to pull the bedclothes back, but Priscilla was sitting on them.

She jumped up, savagely pulled the blankets back, then crashed onto the bed. She pulled the clothes violently over her, hiding her head. I could hear her mumbling underneath, "Ashamed, oh ashamed--Showing me to all those people--I want to die, I want to die--" She began sobbing.

I sat down beside her and looked at my watch. It was after twelve. No one had thought to pull the curtains back and the room was still twilit. There was a horrible smell. I patted the heaving mass of blankets. Only a little of her hair was visible, with a dirty line of grey at the roots of the gold. Her hair was dry and brittle, more like some synthetic fibre than like human hair. I felt disgust and helpless pity and a prowling desire to vomit. I sat for a time patting her with the awkward ineffectual gesture of a small child trying to pat an animal. I could not make out what forms I was touching. I wondered if I should firmly pull off the covers and take her hand, but when I plucked at the blankets she burrowed deeper and even her hair disappeared.

Rachel called, "The ambulance has come."

I said to Francis, "Could you deal with this?" I went out into the hall, past where Francis was talking to the ambulance men, and went into the sitting-room.

Julian, looking like one of my pieces of china, was back in her place by the display cabinet. Rachel was lying sprawled in an armchair with a rather odd smile on her face. Rachel said, "She'll be all right?"

"Yes."

Julian said, "Bradley, I wonder if I could buy this off you?"

"What?"

"This little thing. I wonder if I could buy it? Would you sell it to me?"

Rachel said, "Julian, don't be so tiresome."

Julian was holding in her hand one of the little Chinese bronzes, a piece which I had had for many years. A water buffalo with lowered head and exquisitely wrinkled neck bears upon his back an

aristocratic lady of delicate loveliness with a many-folded dress and high elaborate hair.

"I wonder if--?"

Rachel said, "Julian, you can't ask people to sell you their belongings!"

"Keep it, keep it," I said.

"Bradley, you mustn't let her--"No, I'll buy it--"

"Of course you can't buy it! Keep it!" I sat down. "Where's Arnold?"

"Oh thank you! Why, here's a letter addressed to Dad, and one for me. May I take them?"

"Yes, yes. Where's Arnold?"

"He's gone to the pub," said Rachel, smiling a little more broadly.

"She felt it wasn't quite the moment," said Julian.

"Who felt?"

"He's gone to the pub with Christian."

"With Christian?"

"Your ex-wife arrived," said Rachel, smiling. "Arnold explained that your sister had just attempted suicide. Your ex-wife felt it was not the moment for a reunion. She retired from the scene and Arnold escorted her. I don't know where to exactly. 'To the pub' were 1r his words."

My mother was very important to me. I loved her, but always with a kind of anguish. I feared loss and death to an extent I think unusual in a child. Later I sensed with profound distress the hopeless lack of understanding which existed between my parents. They could not "see" each other at all. My father, with whom I increasingly identified myself, was nervous, timid, upright, conventional and quite without the grosser forms of vanity. He avoided crossing my mother, but he patently disapproved of her "worldliness" and detested the "social scene" into which she and Priscilla were constantly attempting to penetrate. His dislike of this "scene" was also compounded with a simple sense of inadequacy. He was afraid of making some undignified mistake, revelatory of lack of education, such as the mispronunciation of some well-known name. I shared, as I grew up, my father's disapproval and his anxiety. One reason perhaps why I so passionately desired education for myself was that I saw how unhappy the lack of it had made him. I felt for my misguided mother pain and shame which did not diminish but qualified my love. I was mortally afraid of anyone seeing her as absurd or pathetic, a defeated snob. And later still, after her death, I transferred many of these feelings to Priscilla.

It was the day after her exploit with the sleeping pills. The ambulance had taken her to the hospital from which she had been

discharged on the same afternoon. She was brought back to my flat and went to bed. She was still in bed, in my bed, the time being about ten-thirty in the morning. The sun was shining. The Post Office Tower glittered with newly minted detail.

I had of course failed to find Arnold and Christian. Looking for someone is, as psychologists have observed, perceptually peculiar, in that the world is suddenly organized as a basis upon which the absence of what is sought is bodied forth in a ghostly manner. The familiar streets about my house, never fully to recover from this haunting, were filled with non-apparitions of the pair, fleeing, laughing, mocking, overwhelmingly real and yet invisible. Other pairs simulated them and made them vanish, the air was smoky with them. But it was too good a joke, too good a coup, for Arnold to risk my spoiling its perfection. By now they were somewhere else, not in the Fitzroy or the Marquis or the Wheatsheaf or the Black Horse, but somewhere else: and the white ghosts of them blew into my eyes, like white petals, like white flakes of paint, like the scraps of paper which the hieratic boy had cast out upon the river of the roadway, images of beauty and cruelty and fear.

Lying horribly awake that night I decided that the matter of Christian and Arnold was simple. It had to be simple: it was either simplicity or insanity. If Arnold "made friends" with Christian I would simply drop him. In spite of having solved this problem I could not sleep, however. I kept following series of coloured images which, like the compartments of a swing door, simply led me round and landed me back again in the aching wide-awake world. When I slept at last I was humiliated in my dreams.

"Well, why did you rush away in such a hurry? If, as you say, you decided ages ago to leave Roger, why didn't you pack a suitcase and go off in a taxi some morning when he was at the office, in an orderly manner?"

"I don't think one leaves one's husband like that," said Priscilla.

"That's how sensible girls leave their husbands."

The telephone rings.

"Hello, Pearson. Hartbourne here."

"Oh, hello--"

"I wondered if we could have lunch on Tuesday."

"Sorry, I'm not sure, my sister's here--I'll ring you back--Tuesday? My whole concept of the future had crumpled.

Through the open door of the bedroom as I laid the phone to rest I could see Priscilla wearing my red-and-white striped pyjamas, flopped in a deliberately uncomfortable position, her arms spread wide like a puppet, still steadily crying. The horror of the world seen

without charm. Priscilla's woebegone tearful face was crumpled and old. Had she ever really resembled my mother? Two hard deep lines ran down on either side of her blubbering mouth. Beyond the runnels of the tears the dry yellow make-up revealed the enlarged pores of her skin. She had not washed since her arrival.

"Oh Priscilla, stop it, do. Try to be a bit brave at least."

"I know I've lost my looks--"As if that mattered!"

"So you think I look horrible, you think--"I don't! Please, Priscilla--"Roger hated the sight of me, he said so. And I used to cry in front of him, I'd sit and cry for hours with sheer misery, sitting there in front of him, and he'd just go on reading the paper."

"That's just nonsense, Priscilla." •> "Oh Bradley, if only we hadn't killed that child--She had already been onto this subject at some length.

"Oh Bradley, if only we'd kept the child--But how was I to know I wouldn't be able to have another one? That child, that one child, to think that it existed, it cried out for life, and we killed it deliberately. It was all Roger's fault, he insisted that we get rid of it, he didn't want to marry me, we killed it, the special one, the only one, my dear little child--"Oh do stop, Priscilla. It would be well over twenty now and on drugs, the bane of your life." I have never desired children myself and can scarcely understand this desire in others.

"Twenty--a grown-up son--someone to love--to look after me-- Oh Bradley, you don't know how I have yearned day and night for that child. He would have made all the difference to Roger and me. I think Roger began to hate me when he found I couldn't have children. And it was all his fault anyway. He found that rotten doctor. Oh it's so unjust, so unjust--"

"Of course it's unjust. Life is unjust. Do stop whingeing and try to be practical. You can't stay here. I can't support you. Anyway I'm going away."

"I'll get a job."

"Priscilla, be realistic, who would employ you?"

"I'll have to."

"You're a woman over fifty, with no education and no skill. You're unemployable."

"You're so unkind--"

The telephone rings again.

The oily ingratiating tones of Mr. Francis Marloe.

"Oh Brad, please forgive me, but I thought I'd just give a tinkle to ask how Priscilla is."

"Oh good. Oh Brad, I just thought I'd tell you the hospital psych said better not leave her alone, you know."

"Rachel told me yesterday."

"I don't want to know things like that."

"You and Dad made me feel so ashamed and inferior in the old days, you were both so cruel to me and Mum, Mum was so unhappy--"

"Either you must return to Roger or you must make some definite financial arrangement with him. It's nothing to do with me. You've got to face up to things.

"Bradley, please, will you go and see Roger--?"

"No, I will not!"

"Oh God, if only I'd taken my jewels with me, they mean so much to me, I saved up to buy them, and the mink stole. And there's two silver goblets on my dressing table and a little box made of malachite--"

"Priscilla, don't be childish. You can get these things later."

"No, I can't. Roger will have sold them out of spite. The only consolation I had was buying things. If I bought some pretty thing it cheered me up for a while and I could save out of the housekeeping money and it cheered me up a little bit. I got my diamante set and I got a crystal-and-lapis necklace which was quite expensive and--"

"Why hasn't Roger telephoned? He must know you're here."

"He's too proud and hurt. Oh you know, in a way I feel so sorry for Roger, he's been so miserable, shouting at me or else not talking at all, he must be so terribly unhappy inside himself, really wrecked and mentally broken somehow. Sometimes I've felt he must be going mad. How can anyone go on living like that, being so unkind and not caring any more? He wouldn't let me cook for him any more and he wouldn't let me into his room and I know he never made his bed and his clothes were filthy, and smelt and sometimes he didn't even shave, I thought he'd lose his job. Perhaps he has lost his job and didn't dare to tell me. And now it must be even worse. I kept the house a bit tidy though it was hard to when he so obviously didn't care. Now he's all alone in that filthy pigsty, not eating, not caring--"I thought he was surrounded by women."

"Bradley, please would you go to Bristol--"It sounds to me as if you're dying to go back to the man--"Please would you go and get my jewels, I'll give you the key."

"Oh do stop going on about your jewels. They're all right. They're legally yours anyway. A wife owns her own jewellery."

"The law isn't anything. Oh I do want them so, they're the only things I've got, I haven't got anything else, I haven't anything else in the world, I feel they're calling out to me--And the little ornaments, that stripy vase--"Priscilla dear, do stop raving."

"Bradley, please please go to Bristol for me. He won't have had time to sell them yet, he won't have thought of it. Besides he

probably imagines I'm coming back. They're all still in their places. I'll give you the key of the house and you can go in when he's at the office and just get those few things, it will be quite easy and it will make such a difference to my mind, and then I'll do anything you like, oh it will make such a difference--The front doorbell rang at this point. I got up. I felt stupidly upset. I made a sort of caressing gesture to Priscilla and left the room, closing the door. I went to the front door of the flat and opened it.

Arnold Baffin was outside. We moved into the sitting-room, smoothly, like dancers.

Arnold's face, with any emotion, tended to become uniformly pink, as if a pink light had been switched onto it. He was flushed so now, his pale eyes behind his glasses expressing a sort of nervous solicitude. He patted my shoulder, or dabbed at it with the quick gesture of one playing "tig."

"How is she?"

"Much better. You and Rachel were so kind."

"Rachel was. Bradley, you're not angry with me, are you?"

"What is there to be angry about?"

"You know--they did tell you--that I went off with Christian?"

"I don't want to hear about Mrs. Evandale," I said.

"You are angry. Oh Christ."

"I am NOT angry! I just don't--want to--know--"I didn't intend this, it just happened."

"All right! So that's that!"

"But I can't pretend it didn't happen, can I? Bradley, I've got to talk to you about it--just to make you stop blaming me--I'm not a fool--after all I'm a novelist, damn it!--I know how complicated--"I don't see what being a novelist has to do with it or why you have to drag that in--"I only mean I understand how you feel--"I don't think you do. I can see you're excited. It must have amused you very much to be the reception committee for my ex-wife. Naturally you want to talk about it. I am telling you not to."

"But Bradley, she's a phenomenon."

"I am not interested in phenomena."

"My dear Bradley, you must be curious, you must be. If I were you I'd be dying with curiosity. There's hurt pride, I suppose, and--"There's no question of hurt pride. / left her."

"Well, resentment or something, I know time doesn't heal. That's the silliest idea of all. But God, I'd be so curious. I'd want to see what she'd become, what she was like. Of course she sounds like an American now--"I don't want to know!"

"You never gave me any idea of her. To listen to you talk--"Arnold, since you're such a clever novelist and so full of human

psychology, please understand that this is dangerous ground. If you want to imperil our friendship go ahead. I can't forbid you to be acquainted with Mrs. Evandale. But you must never mention her name to me. This could be the end of our friendship, and I mean it."

"Our friendship is a tough plant, Bradley. Look, I just refuse to pretend that this thing hasn't happened, and I don't think you ought to either. I know people can be awful dooms for each other--"Precisely."

"But sometimes if you face a thing it becomes tolerable. You ought to face this, and anyway, you've got to, she's here and she's determined to see you, she's absolutely mad with interest, you can't avoid her. And you know, she is a most enormously nice person--"I think that is the stupidest thing I have ever heard you say."

"All right, I know what you mean. But since you still feel so emotional about her--"I don't!"

"Bradley, be sincere."

"You've met her, you've discussed me, you think she's 'a most enormously nice person--"Bradley, don't shout. I--"

The telephone rings again.

I go and lift the receiver.

"Brad! I say, is that really you? Guess who this is!"

I put the telephone down, settling it carefully back onto its stand.

I went back into the sitting-room and sat down. "That was her."

"You've gone quite white. You're not going to faint, are you? Can I get you something? Please forgive me for talking so stupidly. Is she hanging on?"

"No. I put the thing--down--The telephone rings again. I do nothing."

"Bradley, let me talk to her."

"No."

I get to the telephone just after Arnold has lifted the receiver. I bang it back onto the rest.

"Bradley, don't you see, you've got to deal with this, you can't shirk it, you can't. She'll come round in a taxi."

The telephone rings again. I lift it up and hold it a little way off. Christian's voice, even with the American tang, is recognizable. The years drop away. "Brad, do listen, please. I'm round at the flat, you know, our old place. Why won't you come round? I've got some Scotch. Brad, please don't just bang the phone down, don't be mean. Come round and see me. I do so want to take a look at you. I'll be here all day, till five o'clock anyway."

I put the telephone down.1

"She wants me to go and see her."

"You've got to, you've got to, it's your fate!"

"I'm not going."

The telephone rings again. I take it off and lay it down on the table. It bubbles remotely. Priscilla calls in a shrill voice, "Bradley!"

"Don't touch that," I said to Arnold, pointing at the telephone. I went in to Priscilla.

"Is that Arnold Baffin out there?" She was sitting on the side of the bed. I saw with surprise that she had put on her blouse and skirt and was putting some thick yellowish-pinkish muck onto her nose.

"Yes."

"I think I'll come out to see him. I want to thank him."

"As you like. Look, Priscilla, I'm going to be away for an hour or two. Will you be all right? I'll come back at lunch time, maybe a bit late. I'll ask Arnold to stay with you."

"You will come back soon?"

"Yes, yes."

I ran in to Arnold. "Could you stay with Priscilla? The doctor said she shouldn't be left alone."

Arnold looked displeased. "I suppose I can stay. Is there any drink? I wanted to talk to you about Rachel, actually, and about that funny letter you wrote me. Where are you off to?"

"I'm going to see Christian."

Marriage is a curious institution, as I have already remarked. I cannot quite see how it can be possible. People who boast of happy marriages are, I submit, usually self-deceivers, if not actually liars. The human soul is not framed for continued proximity, and the result of this enforced neighbourhood is often an appalling loneliness for which the rules of the game forbid assuagement. There is nothing like the bootless solitude of those who are caged together. Those outside the cage can, to their own taste, satisfy their need for society by more or less organized dashes in the direction of other human beings. But the unit of two can scarcely communicate with others, and is fortunate, as the years go by, if it can communicate within itself. Or is this the sour envious view of the failed husband? I speak now of course of ordinary "successful" marriages. Where the unit of two is a machine of mutual hatred there is hell in a pure form. I left Christian before our hell was quite perfected. I saw very clearly what it would be like.

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The reason why, after swearing that I would not see her, I changed my mind and rushed to her was simply this. I realized quite suddenly that I would now be in torment until I had seen her and settled that she had no more power over me. Witch she might be, but surely not for me any more. And this was of course made much more obviously necessary by Arnold's having, by this vile chance, "got in on her." I think his describing her as "an enormously nice person" had some cosmic effect on me. So she had got out of my mind and was walking about? Arnold had seen her with innocent eyes. Why did this threaten me so terribly? By going to see her myself I would be able to "dilute" the power of her meeting with Arnold. But I did not think all this out immediately. I acted on instinct, wanting to know the worst.

The little street in Netting Hill where we had lived in our more recent previous existence had become a good deal lusher since those days. I had, of course, avoided it always. I saw now as I ran along the pavement that the houses had been glossily painted, blue, yellow, dusty pink, the doors had fancy knockers, the windows cast-iron decorations, false shutters, window boxes. I had dismissed the taxi at the corner as I did not want Christian to see me before I saw, her.

The sudden recrudescence of the far past makes one dizzy even when there are no ugly features involved. There seemed to be no oxygen in the street. I ran, I ran. She opened the door.

I think I would not have recognized her at once. She looked slimmer and taller. She had been a bouncy sensuous frilly woman. Now she looked more austere, certainly older, also smarter, wearing a simple dress of mousy light-brown tweed and a chain belt. Her hair, which used to be waved, was straight, thick, longish, faintly

undulating, and dyed, I suppose, to a reddish brown. Her face was more bony, a little wrinkled, the faintest wizening effect as on an apple, not unpleasant. The long liquidy brown eyes had not aged or dimmed. She looked competent and distinguished, like the manager of an international cosmetic firm.

The expression of her face as she opened the door is hard to describe. Mainly she was excited, almost to the point of idiotic laughter, but attempting to appear calm. I think she must have seen me first through the window. She did in fact laugh, in a suppressed burp of merriment as I came in, and exclaimed something, perhaps "Jesus!" I could feel my own face twisted and flattened as if under a nylon-stockings mask. We got into the sitting-room which was mercifully dark. It seemed to look very much as it had used to look. Huge emotions like gauze curtains made the place breathless, perhaps actually made it dark. One cannot at the time name these things, only later can one press them away and give them names. There was a moment of stillness. Then she moved toward me. I thought, rightly or wrongly, that she was going to touch me, and I moved back towards the window, behind an armchair. She laughed, in a sort of crazy wail like a bird. I saw her uncontrolled laughing face like a grotesque ancient mask. Now she looked old.

She had turned her back on me and was fiddling in a cupboard.

"Oh Jesus, I shall get the giggles. Have a drink, Bradley. Scotch? I guess we need something. I hope you're going to be nice to me. What a horrid letter you wrote me."

"Letter?"

"There was a letter addressed to me in your sitting-room. Arnold gave it to me. Here, take this and stop trembling."

"No thank you."

"God, I'm trembling too. Thank heavens Arnold rang up and said you were coming. I might have fainted otherwise. Are we glad to see each other?"

The voice was faintly steadily American. Now that I could see her more distinctly among the dark blurry browns and blues of the room I realized how handsome she had become. The old terrible nervy vitality had been shaped by a mature elegance into an air of authority. How had a woman without education managed to do that to herself in a little town in the Middle West of America?

The room was almost the same. It represented and recalled a much earlier me, a younger and yet unformed taste: wickerwork, wool-embroidered cushions, blurry lithographs, hand-thrown pottery with purple glazes, hand-woven curtains of flecked mauve linen, straw matting on the floor. A calm pretty insipid place. I had created that

room years and years and years ago. I had wept in it. I had screamed in it.

"All right."

"Your ma still alive?"

"No."

"Unwind, man. I'd forgotten what a bean pole you are. Maybe you got thinner. Your hair's thinner but it's not grey, is it, I can't see. You always did look a bit like Don Quixote. You don't look too bad. I thought you might be an old man all bald and shambling. How do I look? Jesus, what a time interval, isn't it."

"Yes."

"Drink, won't you, it'll loosen your tongue. Do you know something, I'm glad to see you! I looked forward to you on the ship. But I guess I'm glad to see everything just now, I get a buzz from the whole world just now, everything's bright and beautiful. Do you know I did a course in Zen Buddhism? I guess I must be enlightened, everything's so glorious! I thought poor old Evans would never get on with the departure scene, I prayed every day for that man to die, he was a sick man. Now I wake up every morning and remember it's really true and I close my eyes again and I'm in heaven. Not a very holy attitude is it, but it's nature, and at my age at least you can be sincere. Are you shocked, am I awful? Yes, I think I am glad to see you, I think it's fun. God, I just want to laugh and laugh, isn't that odd?"

As I looked at her I felt that old fear of a misunderstanding which amounted to an invasion, a taking over of my thoughts. I tried to stare at her and to be cold, to find a controlled tone of voice which was hard and calm. I spoke.

"I came to see you simply because I thought that you would annoy me until I did. I meant what I said in my letter. It was not 'excited,' it was just a statement. I do not want and will not tolerate any renewal of our acquaintance. And now that you have satisfied your curiosity by looking at me and had your laugh will you please understand that I want to hear no more of you. I say this just in case you might conceive it to be 'fun' to pester me. I would be grateful if you would keep away from me, and keep away from my friends too."

"Oh come on, Brad, you don't own your friends. Are you jealous already?"

The jibe brought back the past, her adroit determination to retain every advantage, to have every last word. I felt myself blushing with anger and distress. I must not enter into argument with this woman. I decided to repeat my statement quietly and then go. "Please leave me alone. I do not like you or want to see you. Why should I? It sickens me that you are back in London. Be kind enough to leave me

absolutely alone from now on."

"I feel pretty sick too, do you know? I feel all kind of moved and touched. I thought about you out there, Brad. We did make a mess of things, didn't we. We got so across each other, it spoilt the world in a way. I talked about you with my guru. I thought of writing you-"

"Goodbye."

"Don't go, Brad, please. There's so much I want to talk to you about, not just about the old days but about life, you know. You're my only friend in London, I'm so out of touch. You know I bought the upper flat here, now I own the whole house. Evans thought it was a good investment. Poor old Evans, God rest his soul, he was a real bit of ail-American stodge, though he understood business all right. I amused myself getting educated, or I'd have died of boredom. Remember how we used to dream of buying the upper flat? I'm having the builders in next week. I thought you might help me to decide some things. Don't go, Bradley, tell me about yourself. How many books have you published?"

>•' It"

Three.

"Only three? Gosh, I thought you'd be a real author by now."

"I am a real author."

"We had a literary chap from England at our Women Writers' Guild, I asked about you but he hadn't heard of you. I did some writing myself, I wrote some short stories. You're not still at the old Tax grind, are you?"

"I've just retired."

"You aren't sixty-five, are you, Brad? My memory's packed up. How old are you?"

"Fifty-eight. I retired in order to write."

"I just hate to think how old I am. You should have got out years ago. You've given your life to that old Tax office, haven't you. You ought to have been a wanderer, a real Don Quixote, that would have given you subjects. Birds can't sing in cages. Thank the Lord I'm out of mine. I feel so happy I'm quite crazed. I've never stopped laughing since old Evans died, poor old sod. Did you know he was a Christian Scientist? He shouted for a doctor when he got ill all the same, he got in a real panic. And they were organizing prayers for him and he hid the dope when they came round! There's a lot in Christian Science actually, I think I'm a bit of a Christian Scientist myself. Do you know anything about it?"

"No."

"Poor old Evans. There was a sort of kindness in him, a sort of gentleness, but he was so mortally dull he nearly killed me. At least

you were never dull. Do you know that I'm a rich woman now, really quite rich, proper rich? Oh Bradley, to be able to tell you that, it's good, it's good! I'm going to have a new life, Bradley. I'm going to hear the trumpets blowing in my life."

"Goodbye."

"I'm going to be happy and to make other people happy. GO AWAY!"

The last command was, I almost instantly grasped, addressed not to me but to someone behind me who was standing just outside the window, which gave directly onto the pavement. I half turned and saw Francis Marloe standing outside. He was leaning forward to peer in through the glass, his eyebrows raised and a bland submissive smile upon his face. When he could discern us he put his hands together in an attitude of prayer.

"Come upstairs. Quick."

I followed her up the narrow stair and into the front bedroom. This room had changed. Upon a bright pink carpet everything was black and shiny and modern. Christian flung open the window. Something flew out and landed with a clatter in the road. Coming nearer I saw that it was a stripy sponge bag. Out of it tumbled an electric shaver and a toothbrush. Francis scrambled for them quickly, then stood, consciously pathetic, his little close eyes blinking upward, his small mouth still pursed in a humble smile.

"And your milk chocolate. Look out. No, I won't, I'll give it to Brad. Brad, you still like milk chocolate, don't you. See, I'm giving your milk chocolate to Bradley." She thrust the packet at me. I laid it on the bed. "I'm not being heartless, it's just that he's been at me the whole time since I got back, he imagines I'll play mother and support him! God, he's a real Welfare State layabout, like what the Americans think all the English are. Look at him now, what a clown! I gave him money, but he wants to move in and hang up his hat. He climbed in the kitchen window when I was out and I came back and found him in bed! Wow! Look who's here now!"

Another figure had appeared down below, Arnold Baffin. He was speaking to Francis.

"Hey, Arnold!" Arnold looked up and waved and moved towards the front door. She ran away down the stairs again with clacking heels and I heard the door open. Laughter.

Francis was still standing in the gutter holding his electric razor and his toothbrush. He looked towards the door, then looked up at me. He spread his arms, then dropped them at his sides in a gesture of mock despair. I threw the packet of milk chocolate out of the window. I did not wait to see him pick it up. I went slowly down the stairs. Arnold and Christian were just inside the sitting-room door,

both talking.

I said to Arnold, "You left Priscilla."

"Bradley, I'm sorry," said Arnold. "Priscilla attacked me."

"Attacked you?"

"Maybe I ought to have stuck it out somehow, but it was all--well, I won't go into ungentlemanly details--I was just thinking it would be best for both of us if I cleared out when Rachel turned up. She didn't know I was there, she was after you, Bradley. So I hopped it and left her holding the baby. You see, Priscilla wound her arms quite tightly round my neck and I couldn't even sort of talk to her--Perhaps it was very ungallant--I'm terribly sorry, Bradley--What would you have done, I mean mutatis mutandis--"You funny man, you," said Christian. "You're quite excited! I don't believe it was like that at all! And what were you saying about me, you don't know anything about me! Does he, Brad? You know, Brad, this man makes me laugh."

"You make me laugh too!" said Arnold.

They both began to laugh. The hilarious excitement which Christian had been holding in check throughout our interview burst wildly forth. She laughed, wailing, gasping for breath, leaning back against the door with tears spilling from her eyes. Arnold laughed too, without control, hands hanging, head back, mouth gaping, eyes closed. They swayed. They roared.

I went straight on past them out of the door and began to walk quickly down the street. Francis Marloe ran after me. "Brad, I say, could I talk to you a minute?"

I ignored him and he fell away. As I reached the corner of the road he shouted after me, "Brad! Thanks for the chocolate!"

Priscilla had been much relieved when I had agreed to go and fetch these objects, to which she seemed to attach an almost magical significance. It was agreed that after their abstraction Roger should be formally asked to pack up and send the rest of her clothes. Priscilla did not imagine that he would impound these, once her jewels were saved. She kept saying that Roger might sell her "precious things" out of spite, and on reflection I felt that this was indeed possible. I had hoped that my really, all things considered, very kind offer of a salvage operation would cheer Priscilla up. But once this source of anxiety was alleviated, she started up again an almost continuous rigmarole of remorse and misery, about the lost child, about her age, about her personal appearance, about her husband's unkindness, about her ruined useless life. Uncontrolled remorse, devoid of conscience or judgment, is very unattractive. I felt shame for my sister at this time and would gladly have kept her hidden away. However someone had to be with her and Rachel, who had heard a good deal of these repinings on the previous day, agreed, dutifully but without

enthusiasm, to stay with Priscilla during my Bristol journey, provided I returned as early as possible on the same day.

The telephone rang in the empty house. It was office hours, afternoon. I was looking at my well-shaven upper lip in the telephone-box mirror, and thinking about Christian. What these thoughts were I will explain later. I could still hear that demonic laughter. A few minutes later, feeling nervous and unhappy and very like a burglar, I was thrusting the key into the lock and pressing gently upon the door. I had brought two large suitcases with me, which I put down in the hall. There was something unexpected which I had perceived as soon I crossed the threshold, but I could not at once think what it was. Then I realised that it was a strong fresh smell of furniture polish.

Priscilla had so much conveyed the desolation of the house. No one had made the beds for weeks. She had given up washing dishes. The char had left of course. Roger had taken a savage satisfaction part one 75 in increasing the mess and blaming her for it. Roger broke things deliberately. Priscilla would not clear them up. Roger found a plate with mouldy food upon it. He smashed the plate upon the ground in front of Priscilla in the hall. There it lay, with the pieces of broken plate and the muck spread upon the carpet. Priscilla had passed by with vacant eyes. But the scene as I came through the door was so different that I thought for a moment that I must be in the wrong house. There was a quite conspicuous air of cleanliness and order. The white woodwork shone, the Wilton carpet glowed. There were even flowers, huge red and white peonies, in a big brass jug on the oak chest. The chest had been polished. The jug had been polished.

Upstairs the same rather weird cleanliness and order prevailed. The beds had been made with hospitaline accuracy. There was not a speck of dust anywhere. A clock ticked quietly. It felt eerie, like the Marie Celeste. I gazed out into the garden at a sleek lawn and irises in flower. The sun was shining brightly but a little coolly. Roger must have cut the grass since Priscilla's departure. I went to the long lower drawer of the chest of drawers where Priscilla said she kept her jewel case. I dragged the drawer open, but there was nothing in it but clothes. I jumbled them up, then searched other drawers there and in the bathroom. I opened the wardrobe. There was no sign of the jewel case or of the mink stole. Nor could I see upon the dressing table the silver goblets or the malachite box which were supposed to be there. I felt very upset and ran into the other rooms. One room was simply full of Priscilla's clothes, lying on the bed, on chairs, on the floor, looking so bright and gay and odd. On my rounds I saw the blue-and-white striped china urn, which was considerably larger than Priscilla had suggested, and picked it up. As I stood at a loss upon the landing,

holding the urn, I heard a sound down below me and a voice said, "Hello, it's me."

I came slowly down the stairs. Roger was standing in the hall. When he saw me his mouth opened and his eyebrows went up. He was looking healthy and distinguished, wearing a well-cut grey sports jacket. His grey-brown hair was brushed back over his head in a neat dome. I put the vase down carefully on the chest beside the brass jug with the peonies.

"I came to get Priscilla's jewellery and stuff."

"Is Priscilla with you?"

"No."

"She isn't coming back, is she?"

"No."

"Thank God. Come in here. Have a drink." Roger's voice was prissy and plummy, rather loud, a pseudo-varsity voice, a public-relations voice, a public-speaking cad's voice. We went into the "lounge." (A lounge lizard's voice.) Here too all was neat, there were flowers. The sun was shining.

"I want my sister's jewels."

"Won't you drink? Mind if I do?"

"I want my sister's jewels."

"I'm awfully sorry, but I don't think I can let you have them. You see, I don't know how valuable they are, and until--"And her mink stole."

"Ditto."

"Where are they?"

"Elsewhere. Look, Bradley, we needn't fight, need we?"

"I want the jewels and the mink and that vase I brought down and an enamel picture of--"Oh God. You know Priscilla's a mental case?"

"If she is, you made her one."

"Please. I can't help Priscilla any more. I would if I could. Honestly, it's been such hell. She cleared out, after all."

"You drove her out." I saw Priscilla's little marble statuette on the chimney piece. It looked like Aphrodite. Miserable pity for my sister possessed me. She wanted her little things about her, they might console her. There was not much else left.

"It's no fun being in the house with a hysterical ageing woman. I did try. She got violent. And she stopped cleaning, the place was a wreck."

"I don't want to talk to you. I want the stuff."

"Everything valuable is in the bank. I thought Priscilla might raid the place. She can have her clothes, only for Christ's sake don't encourage her to fetch them in person. In fact I'd be jolly glad to have

her clothes out of the house. But the rest I regard as sub judice."

"Her jewels are her property."

I felt incoherent humiliation and rage. "You deliberately drove her out. She says you tried to poison her--"

"I just put an overdose of salt and mustard into her stew. It must have tasted awful. I sat and watched her trying to eat it. Little pictures out of hell. You've just no idea. I see you've brought two suitcases. I'll put out some of her clothes for you."

"You took all the money out of the joint account--"Well, it was my money, wasn't it? There wasn't any other source of income! She kept drawing it out without telling me and buying clothes. She went mad over buying clothes. There's a room upstairs full of them, never worn. She simply wasted my money. Please let's not fight. After all you're a man, you can understand, you won't start to scream about it. She's a crazy disappointed woman and as cruel as a demon. We both wanted a child. She tricked me into marriage. I only married her because I wanted a child."

"What are you talking about? You insisted on the abortion."

"She wanted the abortion. I didn't know what I wanted. Then when the child was gone I felt awful about it. Then Priscilla told me she was pregnant again. That was your mother's idea. It wasn't true. I married her because I couldn't bear to lose a second child. And there was no child."

"Oh God." I went over to the chimney piece and picked up the marble statuette.

"Leave that alone, please," said Roger. "This isn't an antique shop."

As I put it down there was a step in the hall and a beautiful young girl came in through the door. She was dressed in a mauve canvas jerkin and white slacks, tousled and casual like a girl on a yacht, her dark brown hair gilded. Her face glowed with something more exalted and inward than mere good health and sunshine. She looked about twenty. She was carrying a shopping bag which she put down in the doorway.

I felt utter confusion. Had there been a child after all? Was this she?

Roger leapt up and ran to her, his face relaxed and beaming, his eyes looking larger, more luminous, wider apart. He kissed her on the lips, then held her for a moment, staring at her, smiling and astounded. He gave a short "Oh!" of amazed satisfaction, then turned to me. "This is Marigold. She's my mistress."

"It hasn't taken you long to install one."

"Darling, this is Priscilla's brother. We'd better tell him, hadn't we, darling?"

"Yes, of course, darling," said the girl gravely, pushing back her tousled hair and leaning up against Roger. "We must tell him everything." She had a light West Country accent and I could now see that she was older than twenty.

"Marigold and I have been together for years. We've been half living together for years and years. We never let Priscilla know."

"We didn't want to hurt her," said Marigold. "We carried the burden ourselves. It was hard to know what to do for the best. It has been a terrible time."

"It's over now," said Roger. "Thank God it's over." They were holding hands.

I felt hatred and horror of this sudden cameo of happiness. I ignored the girl and said to Roger, "I can see that living with a girl who could be your daughter must be more fun than observing your marriage vows with an elderly woman."

"I am thirty," said Marigold. "And Roger and I love each other."

'For richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.' Just when she was most in need of help you drove my sister out of her home."

"I didn't!"

"You did!"

"Marigold is pregnant," said Roger.

"How can you tell me that," I said, "with that air of vile satisfaction. Am I supposed to be pleased because you've fathered another bastard? Are you so proud of being an adulterer? I regard you both as wicked, an old man and a young girl, and if you only knew how ugly and pathetic you look, pawing each other and making a vulgar display of how pleased you are with yourselves for having got rid of my sister--You're like a pair of murderers--They moved apart. Marigold sat down, looking up at her lover with a dazed glowing stare. "We didn't do this deliberately," said Roger. "It just happened. We can't help it if we're happy. At least we're acting rightly now, we've stopped lying anyway. We want you to tell Priscilla, to explain everything. God, that will be a relief. Won't it, darling?"

"We've hated telling lies, we really have, haven't we, darling?" said Marigold. "We've both been living a lie for years."

"Marigold had a little flat--I used to visit her--it was a miserable situation."

"Now it's all dropped away and--oh just to be able to speak the truth, it's--We've been so sorry for poor Priscilla--"If you could only see yourselves," I said, "if you could only see yourselves--Now if you will kindly hand over Priscilla's jewellery--"Sorry," said Roger. "I explained."

"She wanted the jewels, the mink, that statuette thing, that

striped urn, some enamel picture--"I bought that statuette thing. It stays here. And I happen to like that enamel picture. These aren't just her things. Can't you see we can't start dividing things up now? There's money involved. She ran off and left the stuff, she can wait! You can have her clothes though. You could put a lot into those suitcases you brought."

"I'll pack them, shall I?" said Marigold. She ran out of the room.

"You will tell Priscilla, won't you?" said Roger. "It'll be such a relief to my mind. I'm such a coward. I've kept putting off breaking it to her."

"When your girl friend got pregnant you deliberately drove your wife away."

"It wasn't a plan! We were just muddling along, we were bloody miserable. We'd waited and waited--"Hoping she'd die, I suppose. I'm surprised you didn't murder her."

"We had to have the child," said Roger. "That child's important and I'm going to act fairly by it. It has some rights, I should think! We had to have our happiness at last and have it fully and truthfully. I want Marigold to be my wife. Priscilla was never happy with me."

"Have you thought about what's going to happen to Priscilla now and what her existence will be like? You've taken her life, now you discard her."

"Well, she's taken my life too. She's taken years and years from me when I might have been happy and living in the open!"

"Oh go to hell!" I said. I went out into the hall where Marigold was kneeling, surrounded by an ocean of silks and tweeds and pink underwear. Most of it looked entirely new.

"Where's the mink?"

"I explained, Bradley."

"Oh you should be ashamed," I said. "Look at you both. You are wicked people. You should be so ashamed."

I said, "I'm not going to wait while you pack these cases." I could not bear to see the girl shaking out Priscilla's things and folding them neatly. "You can send them on to my flat."

"Yes, yes, we'll do that, won't we, darling," said Marigold. "There's a trunk upstairs--"You will tell her, won't you," said Roger. "Tell her as gently as you can. Make it clear though. You can tell her Marigold is pregnant. There's no way back now."

"You've seen to that."

"You must take her something now," said Marigold, kneeling, her bland face glowing with the tender benevolence of real felicity. "Darling, shouldn't we send her that statuette, or--?"

"No. I like that thing."

"Well then that striped vase, didn't she want that?"

"This is my house too," said Roger. "I made it. These things have their places."

"Oh darling, please let Priscilla have that vase, just to please me!"

"Oh all right, darling--What a tender-hearted little muggins it is!"

"I'll pack it up carefully."

"Don't think I'm the devil incarnate, Bradley old man. Of course I'm not a holy character, I'm just an ordinary chap, I doubt if you'll find an ordinarier. You must understand that I've had a rough time. It's been pure hell running two lives, and Priscilla's been awful to me for so long, she's really hated me, she hasn't said a kind or gentle thing to me for years--Marigold came back with a bulky parcel. I took it from her and opened the front door. The outside world looked dazzling, as if I had been in the dark. I stepped outside and looked back at them. They were swaying together, shoulder to shoulder, hand in hand. They could not check two radiant smiles. I wanted to spit upon the doorstep but my mouth was dry.

Later on they were shooting pigeons and the funnel was blue and white, the blue confounded with the sky, the white hung in space like a great cylinder of crinkly paper or like a kite in a picture. Kites have always meant a lot to me. What an image of our condition, the distant high thing, the sensitive pull, the feel of the cord, its invisibility, its length, the fear of loss. I do not usually get drunk. Bristol is the sherry city. Excellent cheap sherry, light and clean, is drawn out of huge dark wooden barrels. I was feeling, for a time, almost mad with defeat.

They were shooting pigeons. What an image of our condition, the loud report, the poor flopping bundle upon the ground, trying helplessly, desperately, vainly to rise again. Through tears I saw the stricken birds tumbling over and over down the sloping roofs of warehouses. I saw and heard their sudden weight, their pitiful surrender to gravity. How hardening to the heart it must be to do this thing: to change an innocent soaring being into a bundle of struggling rags and pain. I was looking at a ship's funnel and it was yellow and black against a sky of tingling lucid green. Life is horrible, horrible, horrible, said the philosopher. When I realized that I had missed the train I rang the number of my London flat and got no reply.

"All things work together for good for those who love God," said Saint Paul. Possibly: but what is it to love God? I have never seen this happening. There is, my dear friend and mentor, some hard-won calm when we see the world very detailed and very close: as close and

as vivid as the newly painted funnels of ships on a sunny evening. But the dark and the ugly is not washed away, this too is seen, and the horror of the world is part of the world. There is no triumph of good, and if there were it would not be a triumph of good. There is no drying of tears or obliteration of the sufferings of the innocent and of those who have undergone crippling injustice in their lives. I tell you, my dear, what you know better and more deeply than I can ever know it. Even as I write these words, which should be lucid and filled with glowing colour, I feel the very darkness of my own personality invading my pen. Only perhaps in the ink of this darkness can this writing properly be written? It is not really possible to write like an angel, though some of our near-gods by heaven-inspired trickery sometimes seem to do it.

Later on the empty lighted street was like a theatre set. The black wall at the end of it was a ship's hull. The stone of the quay and the steel of the hull touched each other and I sat upon the stone and leaned my head against the hollow steel. I was in a shop lying under the counter with a woman, and all the shelves were cages containing dead animals which I had forgotten to feed. Ships are compartmental and hollow, ships are like women. The steel vibrated and sang, sang of the predatory women, Christian, Marigold, my mother: the destroyers. I saw the masts and sails of great clippers against a dark sky. Later I sat in Temple Meads station and howled inside myself, suffering the torments of the wicked under those pitiless vaults. Why had no one answered the telephone? A train after midnight took me away. Somehow I had managed to break the blue-and-white china urn. I left the fragments in the compartment when I got out at Paddington.

I was at Christian's house where they had taken Priscilla. Later I was with Rachel in a garden. This was no dream. And somebody was flying a kite.

I found a note from Rachel waiting, and Rachel herself came early, very early, soon after I had arrived, to tell me what had happened: how Priscilla had become upset, how Christian had telephoned, how Arnold had come, how Francis had come. When I failed to appear Priscilla had become as fretful as a little child awaiting its tardy mother, tears, fears. Late in the evening Christian had carried Priscilla off in a taxi. Arnold and Christian had laughed a great deal. Rachel thought I would be angry with her. I was not. "Of course you could do nothing if they decided otherwise."

"It's not a plot, Bradley, don't look like that."

"He's furious with us."

"He thinks you're holding Priscilla as a hostage!"

"I am holding Priscilla as a hostage!"

"Whatever happened to you? Priscilla was terribly upset."

"I missed the train. I'm very sorry."

"Why did you miss the train?"

"Why didn't you telephone?"

"How guilty he looks! Look, Priscilla, how guilty he looks!"

"Poor Priscilla thought you'd been run over or something."

"You see, Priscilla, we told you he'd turn up like an old bad penny."

"Be quiet everybody, Priscilla's trying to say something."

"Bradley, don't be cross."

"Silence for Priscilla!"

"Did you get my things?"

"Sit down, Brad, you look awful."

"I'm sorry I missed the train."

"It's going to be all right."

"I did telephone."

"Did you get my things?"

"Dear Priscilla, don't throw yourself around so."

"I'm afraid I didn't get your things."

"Oh I knew it would go wrong, I knew it would, I knew it would, I told you so!"

"What happened, Bradley?"

"Roger was there. We had a chat."

"A chat!".

"You're on his side now."

"Men always stick together, dear."

"I'm not on his side. Did you want me to fight him?"

"You talked to him about me."

"Of course I did!"

"They agreed that women were hell."

"Well, women are hell!"

"Is he unhappy?"

"Yes."

"Was the house all dirty and awful?"

"Yes."

"But what about my things?"

"He said he'd send them on."

"But didn't you bring anything, not anything?"

"He said he'd pack them up."

"Did you ask him specially about the jewels and the mink?"

"He'll send everything on."

"But did you ask him specially?"

"It's all right, it's going to be all right."

"Yes, I did!"

"He won't sent them, I know he won't--"Priscilla, will you

please get dressed?"

"He won't send my things ever, he won't, he won't, I know he won't, I've lost them forever and ever!"

"I'll wait for you downstairs. Then we can both go home."

"Those jewels are all I've got."

"Oh but Priscilla's going to stay here with me."

"Did you look for them, did you see them?"

"Priscilla, get up, get dressed."

"Aren't you, darling, going to stay here with me?"

"Bradley, you mustn't talk to her like that."

"Brad, be reasonable. She needs medical attention, she needs psychiatric help, I'm going to engage a nurse--"She doesn't need a nurse, for Christ's sake."

"You know you're not a looker-after, Bradley."

"Priscilla--"After all, look what happened yesterday."

"I think I must go," said Rachel who had so far said nothing, still smiling vaguely as at secret thoughts.

"Oh please don't go."

"Is it too early for a drink?"

"You are not going to take over my sister. I will not have her pitied and patronized."

"No one's pitying her!"

"I pity her," said Francis.

"You can just shut up, you're leaving here in three minutes, the real doctor is coming and I don't want you arsing around--"Come on, Priscilla."

"Steady on, Bradley, maybe Chris is right."

"And don't call her Chris."

"You can't have it both ways, Brad, disown me and--"Priscilla is perfectly well, she just needs to pull herself together."

"Bradley doesn't believe in mental illness."

"Well, neither do I as it happens, but--"You are all persuading her she's ill, while what she needs--"Bradley, she needs rest and quiet."

"Is this rest and quiet?"

"Brad, she's a sick woman."

"Priscilla, get up."

"Brad, do stop shouting."

"I think I really must go."

"You do want to stay here with me, don't you, darling, you said so, you want to stay with Christian?"

"He won't send my things, I know he won't, I'll never see them again, never."

"It's going to be all right."

In the end Rachel and Arnold and Francis and I left the house

together. At least, I just turned and walked out, and the others followed somehow.

Out in the street some blackness boiled in my eyes. Sun, filtered through hazy cloud, dazzled me. People loomed in front of me in bulky shadowy shapes and passed me by like ghosts, like trees walking. I could hear the others hurrying after. I had heard them clattering down the stairs, but I did not look round. I felt sick.

"Bradley, you look as if you've gone blind, here, don't walk out into the roadway like that, you ass."

Arnold had hold of my sleeve. He held onto me. The other two crowded up, staring.

Rachel said, "Leave her there for a day or two. Then she'll have recovered and you can take her away."

"You don't understand," I said. My head ached and my eyes were intolerant of the light.

"I understand perfectly, as a matter of fact," said Arnold. "You've just lost this round and you'd better relax. I'd go to bed if I were you."

"I'll come and look after you," said Francis.

"No, you won't."

"Why do you keep shading your eyes and screwing them up like that?" said Rachel.

"What made you miss the train?" said Arnold.

"I think I'll go to bed, yes."

"Bradley," said Arnold, "don't be cross with me."

"I'm not cross with you."

"It was all an accident, my being there I mean, I called in because I thought you'd be back, Christian rang and then she turned up, and Rachel had had about enough of Priscilla and there was no sign of you. I know it seems hurtful, but really it was just common sense, and it amused Christian so much, and you know how I love a scandal and a little bit of turmoil. You've got to forgive us. We're not all conspiring against you."

"I know you're not."

"I only went along today because--"Oh never mind. I'm going home."

"Let me come with you," said Francis.

"You'd better come with me," said Rachel. "I'll give you lunch."

"That's a good idea. You go along with Rachel. I must go to the library and get on with my novel. I've wasted quite enough time on this little drama. I'm such an incorrigible Peeping Tom. You're sure you're not cross with me, Bradley?"

Rachel and I got into a taxi. Francis ran along beside it trying

to say something, but I pulled the window up.

Now at last there was peace. Rachel's big calm woman's face beamed upon me, the beneficent full moon, not the black moon dagger-armed and brimming with darkness. The bruise seemed to have faded, or perhaps she had covered it with make-up. Or perhaps it had only ever been a shadow after all.

Feeding my hangover, I had consumed a lunch which consisted of three aspirins, followed by a glass of creamy milk, followed by milk chocolate, followed by shepherd's pie, followed by Turkish delight, followed by milky coffee. I felt physically better and clearer in the head.

We were sitting on the veranda. The Baffins' garden was not big, but in the flush of early summer it seemed endless. A dotting of fruit trees and ferny bushes amid longish red-tufted grass obscured the nearby houses, obscured even the creosoted fence. Only a hint of pink rambler roses between the trunks suggested an enclosure. The garden was a curved space, a warm green shell smelling of earth and leaves. At the foot of the veranda steps there was a pavement covered with the mauve flowers of creeping thyme, beyond this a clipped grassy path starred with white daisies. It stirred some memory of a childhood holiday. Once in an endless meadow, just able to peer through the tawny haze of the grass tops, the child who was myself had watched a young fox catching mice, an elegant newly minted fox, straight from the hand of God, brilliantly ruddy, with black stockings and a white-tipped brush. The fox heard and turned. I saw its intense vivid mask, its liquid amber eyes. Then it was gone. An image of such beauty and such mysterious sense. The child wept and knew himself an artist.

"So Roger's blissfully happy?" said Rachel, to whom I had told all.

"I can't tell Priscilla, can I?"

"Not yet."

"Roger and that young girl. God, it sickens me!"

"I know. But Priscilla is the problem."

"What am I to do, Rachel, what am I to do?"

Rachel, relaxed, barefoot, did not reply. She was gently stroking her face where I had imagined the bruise. We were reposing now in deck chairs. She was relaxed yet animated, in a characteristic way: what Arnold called her "exalted look." A bright expectancy blazed in her pale freckled face and in her light brown eyes. She looked alert and handsome. Her reddish golden hair was deliberately frizzed out and untidy.

"How mechanical they look," I said.

"Who? What?"

"The blackbirds."

Several blackbirds were walking jerkily about like little woundup toys upon the clipped grass path.

"Just like us."

"What are you talking about, Bradley?"

"Mechanical. Just like us."

"Have some more milk chocolate."

"Francis likes milk chocolate."

"I feel sorry for Francis, but I do see Christian's point."

"All this intimate friendly talk about 'Christian' makes me feel ill."

"You mustn't mind so much. It's all in your head."

"Well, I live in my head. I wish she was dead. I wish she'd died in America. I bet she killed her husband."

"Bradley. You know I didn't mean any of those violent things I said about Arnold the other day."

"Yes, I know."

"In marriage one says things which are, yes, mechanical, but it doesn't affect the heart."

"The what?"

"Bradley, don't be so--"How heavy mine is, like a great stone in my breast. Sometimes one feels suddenly doomed by fate."

"Oh brace up, for God's sake!"

"You don't hate me for having seen--you know, you and Arnold, the other day?"

"No. It just makes you seem closer."

"I wish, I wish she hadn't met Arnold."

"You're very attached to Arnold, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"It's not just that you care what he thinks?"

"No."

"It's odd. He's awkward with you. I know he often hurts you. But he cares very much for you, very much."

"Do you mind if we change the subject a bit?"

"You're such a funny fellow, Bradley. You're so unphysical. And you're as shy as a schoolboy."

"That woman coming back bang into the middle of everything has been such a bloody shock. And she's got her claws into Arnold already. And Priscilla."

"She's beautiful, you know."

"And you."

"No. But I appreciate her. You never described her properly."

"She's changed."

"Arnold thinks you're still in love with her."

"If he thinks that it must be because he's in love with her

himself."

"Are you in love with her?"

"Rachel, do you want me to scream and scream and scream?"

"You are a schoolboy!"

"Only because of her I understand hatred."

"Are you a masochist, Bradley?"

"Don't be daft."

"I sometimes thought you enjoyed it when Arnold went for you."

"Is Arnold in love with her?"

"Where do you suppose he went to when he left us today?"

"To the--Oh, you mean he went back to her?"

"Of course."

"Hell. He's only met her twice, three times--"Don't you believe in love at first sight?"

"So you think he is--?"

"He had a pretty long session with her in that pub. And again last night when--"Don't tell me. Is he?"

"Oh Jesus Christ."

"That was in the pub. Last night I gather they--All right, all right! I just wanted to say I'm on your side. We'll bring Priscilla here if you like."

"It's too late. Oh Christ. Rachel, I don't feel terribly well."

"Oh confound you, Bradley. Here. Take my hand. Take it."

Under the opaque glass of the veranda it had become very hot and sultry. The earth smells and the grass smells were exotic now, like incense, not rainy and fresh. Rachel had edged her deck chair close up against mine. I could feel the nearby weight of her sagging body like a gravitational pull upon my own. She had wound her arm in underneath my arm and rather awkwardly taken hold of my hand. So two corpses might ineptly greet each other on resurrection day. Then she began to turn over towards me, her head pressing onto my shoulder. I could smell her perspiration and the fresh clean scent of her hair.

One is very vulnerable in a deck chair. I had been wondering what kind of hand-holding this was. I did not know what sort of pressure to give her hand or how long to retain it. When her head came thrusting onto my shoulder with that gauche aggressive nuzzling gesture I felt a sudden not unpleasant helplessness. At the same time I said, "Rachel, get up, please, let's go inside."

She shot up out of the chair. I got up more slowly. The slack canvas gave little leverage, and her speed was remarkable. I followed her into the dark drawing-room.

"I beg your pardon, Bradley." She had already thrown open

the door into the hall. Her staccato voice and manner made clear what she thought. I realized that if I did not take her in my arms at once, some quite irreparable "incident" would have occurred. I closed the door into the hall and took her in my arms. I was not reluctant to do so. I felt the hot plumpness of her shoulders and again the heavy nuzzling head.

"Come and sit down, Rachel."

We sat down on the sofa and immediately her lips were pressed against mine.

At the same time, like the excellent Arnold, I was keeping my head, or trying to. I kept my lips upon Rachel's and we remained immobile for a time which began to seem absurdly long. I held her meanwhile rather stiffly, but firmly, one arm still round her shoulder and the other holding her hand. I felt as if I were, in two senses, arresting her. Then we drew apart and studied each other's eyes: possibly to find out what had happened.

The first glimpse of someone's face after they have made an irrevocable gesture of affection is always instructive and moving. Rachel's face was radiant, tender, rueful, questioning. I felt bucked. I wanted to convey pleasure, gratitude. "Oh, dear Rachel, thank you."

"I'm not just trying to cheer you up."

"I know."

"There's a real something here."

"I know. I'm so glad."

"I've wanted to--draw you closer--before. I felt shy. I feel shy now."

"So do I. But--Oh, thank you."

We were silent for a moment, tense, almost embarrassed.

Then I said, "Rachel, I think I must go."

"Oh you are ridiculous," she said. "All right, all right. Schoolboy. Running away. Off you go then. Thank you for kissing me."

"It's not that. It's just so perfect. I'm afraid of spoiling something or something."

"Yes, off you go. I've done enough--damage or whatever."

"No damage. Oh silly Rachel! It's beautiful. We are closer, aren't we?"

We got up and stood holding hands. I suddenly felt extremely happy and laughed.

"Am I absurd?"

"No Rachel. You've given me a piece of happiness."

"Well, hold onto it then. It's mine too."

I pushed the sturdy wiry gingery hair back from the pale freckled puzzled tender face, straining it back with both hands, and I kissed her on the brow. We went out into the hall. We were awkward, moved, pleased, anxious now to carry off a good parting without spoiling the mood. Anxious to be alone to think.

A copy of Arnold's latest novel, *The Woeful Forest*, was lying on the table near the front door. I saw it with a shock, and my hand shot to my pocket. My review of the novel was still there, folded up. I took it out and handed it to Rachel. I said, "Do something for me. Read that and tell me whether or not I should publish it. I'll do whatever you tell me."

"What is it?"

"My review of Arnold's book."

"But of course you must publish it."

"Read it. Not now. I'll do whatever you say."

"All right. I'll see you to the gate."

Coming out into the garden everything was different. It had become evening. There was a lurid indistinct light which made things blurry and hard to locate. Near things were illuminated by a rich hazed sunlight, while the sky farther off was dark with cloud and the promise of night, although in fact it was not yet very late. I felt upset, confused, elated, and very much wanting now to be by myself.

The garden in front of the house was rather long, a lawn planted with small bushes, shrubby roses and the like, with a "crazy paving" path down the centre. The path glimmered white, with dark patches where tufty rock plants were growing between the stones. Rachel touched my hand. I squeezed her fingers but did not hold on. She went first down the path. About half-way to the gate a sense of something behind me made me turn round.

A figure was sitting in an upstairs window, sitting up half reclined upon a window seat, or even it seemed upon the window sill itself. Without seeing the face except as a blur I recognized Julian, and felt an immediate pang of guilt at having kissed the mother when the child was actually in the house. However what more strongly attracted my attention was something else. The window, which was of the hinged casement variety, had been pushed wide open to leave a rectangular space within which the girl, dressed in some kind of white robe, perhaps a dressing-gown, half lay, her knees up, her back against the wooden frame. Her left hand was extended. And I saw that

she was flying a kite.

Rachel had turned round now, and we both stood in silence looking up. The figure above was so odd and separate, like an image upon a tomb, it did not occur to me that I could speak to it. Then as I gazed up at the featureless face, the girl slowly brought her other hand round towards the taut invisible string. There was a faint flash and a faint click. The pale globe up above curtsied for a moment, and then with an air of suddenly collected dignity and purpose rose and began to move slowly away. Julian had cut the string.

The deliberation of the action, and the evident and histrionic way in which it was addressed to its impromptu audience, produced physical shock, like that of some sort of assault. I felt a thrill of pain and dismay. Rachel gave a brief exclamation, a sort of "Ach!" and moved quickly on towards the gate. I followed her. She did not pause at the gate but went on into the road and began to walk briskly along the pavement. I hurried and joined her where she had stopped, out of sight of the house, under a big copper beech tree at the corner of the road. It was getting dark.

"Whatever was that?"

"The balloon? Oh some boy gave it to her."

"But how does it stay up?"

"It's filled with hydrogen or something."

"Why did she cut the string?"

"I can't imagine. Just some sort of act of aggression. She's full of strange fancies just now."

"Is she unhappy?"

"Girls of that age are always unhappy."

"Love, I suppose."

"I don't think she's had love yet. She feels she's somebody very special and she's just beginning to realize that she's not very talented."

"That sounds like the human condition."

"Poor child."

"Oh she's all right, she's lucky. And as you say, it's the human condition. Well, good night, Bradley. I know you want to get away from me."

"No, no--"I don't mean it in a nasty way! You're so shy. I love it. Kiss me."

I kissed her quickly but very fully in the darkness underneath the tree.

"I may write to you," she said.

"Do that."

"Don't worry. Nothing for worry."

"I know. Good night. And thanks."

Rachel gave a weird little laugh and vanished into the obscurity. I began to walk quickly along the next road in the direction of the tube station.

I found that my heart was beating rather violently. I could not make out whether something very important had happened or not. I thought, I shall know tomorrow. Now there was nothing to be done except to rest upon an immediate sense of the experience. Rachel still hovered round me like a perfume. But in my mind with great clarity I saw Arnold, as if he were looking at me from the far end of an illuminated corridor. Whatever had happened had happened to Arnold too.

Just then I saw the balloon again. It was moving slowly along, a little ahead of me, over the tops of the houses. It was lower than it had been before and seemed to be very gradually descending. The street lamps had been turned on, giving a local ineffectual light beneath a sky which was glowing but nearly dark, and in which the pale object was barely visible. A few people were walking along the road, but no one except myself seemed to have noticed the strange wanderer. I began to hurry, trying to gauge its direction. In the suburban villas rectangles of light were appearing in the lower rooms. Sometimes undrawn curtains showed insipid pastel-shaded interiors and sometimes the blue flicker of television. Up above, the neat silhouettes of roofs and the bunched silhouettes of trees were outlined against a dark bluish sky through which the faint globe, its tail now entirely invisible, floated onward. I began to run.

For a moment it was invisible behind a tree. Then suddenly, wafted faster by a momentary breeze, it swept down over the street, moving into the arc of the lamplight. For a second or two it appeared in front of me, huge and yellow, its tail of pendant bows swaying crazily. I could even see the string. I raced towards it. Something lightly brushed my face. The street lamps dazzled me as I clutched above my head, and clutched again. And then it was all gone. The balloon had vanished, descending into some dark and farther maze of suburban gardens. I continued for some while to hurry to and fro among the little intersecting streets, but I did not set eyes again upon the travelling portent.

At the tube station I saw Arnold coming through the ticket barrier, smiling secretively to himself. I moved to the other side and he did not see me. When I reached my flat Francis Marloe was waiting outside the door. I amazed him by asking him in. Of what passed between us then I shall speak later.

One of the many respects, dear friend, in which life is unlike art is this: characters in art can have unassailable dignity, whereas characters in life have none. Yet of course life, in this respect as in

others, pathetically and continually aspires to the condition of art. A sheer concern for one's dignity, a sense of form, a sense of style, inspires more of our baser actions than any conventional analysis of possible sins is likely to bring to light. A good man often appears gauche simply because he does not take advantage of the myriad mean little chances of making himself look stylish. Preferring truth to form, he is not constantly at work upon the fagade of his appearance.

When I say that I also thought I ought to leave London because of what had just happened between me and Rachel I would not be understood as suggesting that I was entirely moved by delicate conscientious scruples, though I did in fact feel such scruples. I felt rather more, about Rachel, a kind of curious detached satisfaction which had many ingredients. One ingredient of a less than worthy sort was a crude and simple sense of scoring off Arnold. Or perhaps that indeed puts it too crudely. I felt that I was now, in a new way, defended against Arnold. There was something important to him which I knew and he did not. (Only later did it occur to me that Rachel might decide to tell Arnold of our kisses.) Such knowledges are always deeply reassuring. Though, to do myself justice, there was in this no intent of going any further with the matter. What was remarkable was how far we had, in our little exchange, actually gone. And that we had gone so far suggested, as Rachel herself later said, that in both our minds the ground had long been prepared. Such dialectical leaps from quantity into quality are common in human relations. This was another reason for going away. I now had more than enough to brood upon and I wanted to brood without the intrusive interference of any real developments. As it was, we had carried the thing off well, with dignity and intelligence. It had a certain completeness. Rachel's gesture had enormously comforted me. I felt no guilt. And I wanted to bask at peace in the rays of that comfort.

However it appeared, when I attempted to be realistic about it, that I could not thus solve my problems all together. Priscilla and myself at Patara was simply not a viable idea. I knew I could not possibly work with my sister in the house. Not only would her sheer nervous presence make work impossible. I knew that she would soon irritate me into all sorts of beastliness. Besides, how ill was she really? Ought she to have medical attention, psychiatric treatment, electric shocks? What ought I to do now about Roger and Marigold and the crystal-and-lapis necklace and the mink stole? Until these things were clarified Priscilla would have to remain in London and so would I.

I let Francis into my house because Rachel had kissed me. At that stage, a fluid all-conquering confidence was still making me feel benevolent and full of power. So I surprised Francis by letting him in.

Also I wanted a drinking companion, I wanted for once to chatter: not about what had happened of course, but about quite other things. When one has a secret source of satisfaction it is pleasing to talk of everything in the world but that. It was also important that I felt myself so immeasurably superior to Francis. Some clever writer (probably a Frenchman) has said: It is not enough to succeed; others must fail. So I felt gracious that evening towards Francis because he was what he was and I was what I was. We both took in a lot of drink and I let him play the fool for my benefit, encouraging him to speculate about methods of getting money out of his sister, a subject on which he was droll. He said, "Of course Arnold wants to bring you and Christian together again." I laughed like a maniac. He also said, "Why shouldn't I stay here and nurse Priscilla?" I laughed again. I threw him out just after midnight.

PS. I've read the review and enclose it with this letter. I think you shouldn't publish it. It would hurt Arnold so much. You and he must love each other. That is so important. Oh help me to remain sane.

I was upset, touched, annoyed, pleased and thoroughly frightened by this emotional and jumbled missive. What large new thing was happening now and what consequences would it have? Why did women have to make things so definite? Why could she not have let our strange experience drift in a pleasant vagueness? I had dimly thought of her as an "ally" against (against?) Arnold. She had made this horrible idea explicit. And if I was to be made mad by a relationship between Arnold and Christian would it help me at all that Rachel was made mad too? How I feared these "needs." I now wanted very much to see Arnold and have a frank talk, even a shouting match. But a frank talk with Arnold was something which seemed to be becoming more and more impossible. In utter dismay I sat down where I was upon a chair in the hall to think it all over. Then the telephone rang.

"Hello, Pearson? Hartbourne here. I'm thinking of giving a little office party."

"A little what?"

"A little office party. I thought of inviting Bingley and Matheson and Hadley-Smith and Caldicott and Dyson, and the wives of course, and Miss Wellington and Miss Searle and Mrs. Bradshaw--"How nice."

"But I want to be sure you can come. You'll be by way of being the guest of honour, you know!"

"How kind."

"Now you tell me a day that would suit you and I'll issue the invitations. It'll be quite like old times. People so often ask after you, I

thought--"Any day suits me."

"Monday?"

"Fine."

"Good. Then eight o'clock at my place. By the way, shall I invite Grey-Pelham? He won't bring his wife, so it should be all right."

"Fine. Fine."

"And I'd like to make a lunch date with you."

"I'll ring you. I haven't got my diary."

"Well, don't forget about the party, will you?"

"I'm writing it down now. Thank you so much."

As I put the telephone down someone began ringing the doorbell. I went and opened the door. It was Priscilla. She marched past me into the sitting-room and immediately began to cry.

"Oh God, Priscilla, do stop."

"You only want me to stop crying."

"All right, I only want you to stop crying. Stop crying."

She lay back in the big "Hartbourne" armchair and in fact stopped. Her hair was in ugly disorder, the darkened parting zigzagging across her head. She lay back limply, gracelessly, with her legs spread and her mouth open. There was a hole in her stocking at the knee through which pink spotty flesh bulged in a little mound.

"Oh Priscilla, I am so sorry."

"Yes. Be sorry. Bradley, I think you're right. I'd better go back to Roger."

"Priscilla, you can't--"

"Why not? Have you changed your mind? You were saying so much I should go back. You said he was so unhappy and the house was so awful. He needs me, I suppose. And it is my home. Nowhere else is. Perhaps he'll be nicer to me now. Bradley, I think I'm going mad, I'm going out of my mind. What's it like when people go mad, does one know one's going mad?"

"Of course you aren't going mad."

"I think I'll go to bed if you don't mind."

"I'm sorry, I still haven't made up the spare bed."

"Bradley, your cabinet looks different, something's gone. Where have you put the water-buffalo lady?"

"The water-buffalo lady?" I looked at the gaping empty space. "Oh yes. I gave her away. I gave her to Julian Baffin."

"Oh Bradley, how could you, she was mine, she was mine." Priscilla gave a little moan and the tears began to flow again. She started to fumble vainly in her bag looking for a handkerchief.

"You couldn't even keep that for me."

"I'll get it back."

"I only let you take her because I knew 1 could visit her here."

I liked visiting her here. She had her place here."

"I'm terribly sorry--"I'll never get my jewels and now even she's gone, my last little thing gone."

"Please, Priscilla, I really will--"You gave her to that wretched girl."

"She asked for it. I will get it back, please don't worry. Now please go to bed and rest."

"She was mine, you gave her to me."

"I know, I know, I'll get it back, now come on, you can have my bed."

Priscilla trailed into the bedroom. She got straight into the bed.

"Don't you want to undress?"

"What's the point. What's the point of anything. I'd be better dead."

"Oh buck up, Priscilla. I'm glad you've come back though. Why did you leave the other place?"

"Arnold made a pass at me."

"Oh!"

"I pushed him away and he turned nasty. He must have told Christian about it. They were downstairs laughing and laughing and laughing. They must have been laughing at me."

"I don't suppose they were. They were just happy."

"Well, I hated it, I hated it."

"Was Arnold there in the afternoon?"

"Oh yes, he came straight back after you'd left, he was there nearly all day, they made a huge lunch downstairs, I could smell it, I didn't want any, and I heard them laughing all the time. They didn't want me, they left me alone nearly all day."

"Poor Priscilla."

"I can't stand that man. And I can't stand her either. They didn't really want me there at all, they didn't care about me really to help me, it was just part of a game, it was like a joke."

"You're right there."

"No."

"She said a doctor was coming but he didn't come. I feel terrible, I think I've got cancer. Everyone despises me, everyone knows what's happened to me. Bradley, could you ring up Roger?"

"Oh no, please--"I'll have to go back to Roger. I could see Dr. Macey at home. Or else I'll kill myself. I think I'll kill myself. No one will care."

"Priscilla, do get properly undressed. Or else get up and comb your hair. I can't bear to see you lying dressed in bed."

"Oh what does it matter, what does it matter."

The front doorbell rang again. I ran to open it. Francis Marloe was outside, his little eyes screwed up with ingratiating humility. "Oh Brad, you must forgive me for coming--"Come in," I said. "You offered to nurse my sister. Well, she's here and you're engaged."

"Really? Oh goodie, goodie!"

"You can go in and nurse her now, she's in there. Can you give her a sedative?"

"I always carry--"All right, go on." I picked up the telephone and dialled Rachel's number. "Hello, Rachel."

"Oh--Bradley--"

I knew at once from her voice that she was alone. A woman can put so much into the way she says your name.

"Rachel. Thanks for your sweet letter."

"Bradley--can I see you--soon--at once--?"

"Rachel, listen. Priscilla's come back and Francis Marloe is here. Listen. I gave Julian a water buffalo with a lady on it."

"A what?"

"A little bronze thing."

"Oh. Did you?"

"Yes. She asked for it, here, you remember."

"Oh yes."

"Well, it's really Priscilla's only I forgot and she wants it back. Could you get it off Julian, and bring it round, or send her? Tell her I'm very sorry--"She's out, but I'll find it. I'll bring it at once."

"The human lot is sad and awful," murmured Francis. "We are demons to each other. Yes, demons." He was looking pleased, pursing up his red lips and casting delighted coy glances at me with his little eyes.

"Priscilla, let me comb your hair."

"No, I can't bear to be touched, I feel as if I were a leper, I feel my flesh is rotting, I'm sure I smell--"Priscilla, do take your skirt off, it must be getting so crumpled."

"What does it matter, what does anything matter, oh I am so unhappy."

"At least take your shoes off."

"Sad and awful, sad and awful. Demons. Demons. Yes."

"Priscilla, do try to relax, you're as rigid as a corpse."

"I wish I was a corpse."

"Do at least make an effort to be comfortable!"

"I gave him my life. I haven't got another one. A woman has nothing else."

"Fruitless and bootless. Fruitless and bootless."

"Oh I'm so frightened--"Priscilla, there's nothing to be frightened of. Oh God, you are getting me down!"

"Frightened."

"Do please take your shoes off."

The front doorbell rang. I opened the door to Rachel and was making her a rueful face when I saw that Julian was standing just behind her.

Rachel said meaningfully, "Julian arrived back and insisted on bringing the thing along herself."

Julian said, "Of course I'm very glad to bring it back to Priscilla, of course it's hers and she must have it. I do so hope it will make her feel happier and better."

I let them in and ushered them into the bedroom where Priscilla was still talking to Francis. "He had no idea of equality between us, I suppose no man has, they all despise women--"Men are terrible, terrible--"Visitors, Priscilla!"

Priscilla, her shoes humping the edge of the quilt, was propped up on several pillows. Her eyes were red and swollen with crying, and her mouth was rectangular with complaint, like the mouth of a letter box.

Julian went directly and sat on the bed. She laid the irises down reverently beside Priscilla and then pushed the water-buffalo lady along the coverlet, as if she was amusing a child, and thrust it up against Priscilla's blouse, in the hollow between her breasts. Priscilla, not knowing what the thing was, and looking terrified, gave a little cry of aversion. Julian then took it into her hand to kiss her and made a dive at her cheek. Their two chins collided with a click.

I said soothingly, "There you are, Priscilla. There's your water-buffalo lady. She came back home to you after all."

Julian had retreated to the bottom of the bed. She stared at Priscilla with a look of agonized and still rather self-conscious pity. She opened her lips and put her hands together as if praying. It looked as if she were begging Priscilla's pardon for being young and good-looking and innocent and unspoilt and having a future, while Priscilla was old and ugly and sinful and wrecked and had none. The contrast between them went through the room like a spasm of pain.

Priscilla murmured, "I'm not a child. You needn't all be so sorry for me. You needn't all stare at me--and treat me as if I were a--She fumbled for the water buffalo and for a moment it looked as if she were going to fondle it. Then she threw it from her across the room where it crashed against the wainscot. Her tears began again and she buried her face in the pillow. The irises fell to the floor. Francis, who had picked up the bronze, hid it within his hands and smiled. I motioned Rachel and Julian out of the room.

In the sitting-room Julian said, "I'm terribly sorry."

"It wasn't your fault," I told her.

"It must be so awful to be like that."

"You can't imagine," I said, "what it is to be like that. So don't bother to try."

"I'm so awfully sorry for her."

Rachel said, "You run along now."

Julian said, "Oh I do wish--Ah well--" She went to the door. Then she said to me, "Bradley, could I have just a word with you? Could you just walk with me to the corner. I won't keep you more than a moment."

I gave a complicit wave to Rachel and followed the child out of the house. She walked confidently down the court and into Charlotte Street without looking round. The cold sun was shining brightly and I felt a great sense of relief at being suddenly out in the open among busy indifferent anonymous people under a blue clean sky.

We walked a few steps along the street and stopped beside a red telephone box. Julian now wore a rather jaunty boyish air. She was clearly feeling relieved too. Above her, behind her, I saw the Post Office Tower, and it was as if I myself were as high as the tower, so closely and so clearly could I see all its glittering silver details. I was tall and erect: so good was it for that moment to be outside the house, away from Priscilla's red eyes and dulled hair, to be for a moment with someone who was young and good-looking and innocent and unspoilt and who had a future.

Julian said with a responsible air, "Bradley, I'm very sorry I got that all wrong."

"Nobody could have got it right. Real misery cuts off all paths to itself."

"How well you put it! But a saintly person could have comforted her."

"There aren't any, Julian. Anyway you're too young to be a saint."

"I know I'm stupidly young. Oh dear, old age is so awful, poor Priscilla. Look, Bradley, what I wanted to say was just thank you so much for that letter. I think it's the most wonderful letter that anybody ever wrote to me."

"What letter?"

"That letter about art, about art and truth."

"Oh that. Yes."

"I regard you as my teacher."

"Kind of you, but--"I want you to give me a reading list, a larger one."

"Thank you for bringing the water buffalo back. I'll give you something else instead."

"Oh will you, please? Anything will do, any little thing. I'd so like to have something from you, I think it would inspire me, something that's been with you a long time, something that you've handled a lot."

I was rather touched by this. "I'll look out something. And now I'd better--"Bradley, don't go. We hardly ever talk. Well, I know we can't now, but do let's meet again soon, I want to talk to you about Hamlet."

"Hamlet! Oh all right, but--"

"I have to do it in my exam. And Bradley, I say, I did agree with that review you wrote about my father's work."

"How did you see that review?"

"I saw my mother putting it away, and she looked so secretive--"That was very sly of you."

"I know. I'll never become a saint, not even if I live to be as old as your sister. I do think my father should be told the truth for once, everyone has got into a sort of mindless habit of flattering him, he's an accepted writer and a literary figure and all that, and no one really looks at the stuff critically as they would if he were unknown, it's like a conspiracy--"I know. All the same I'm not going to publish it."

"And another thing, about Christian, my father says he's working Christian on your behalf--"What?"

"I don't know what he thinks he's at, but I'm sure you should go and see him and ask him. And if I were you I'd get away like you told them you were going to. Perhaps I could come and see you in Italy, I'd love that. Francis Marloe can look after Priscilla, I rather like him. I say, do you think Priscilla will go back to her husband? I'd rather die than do that if I was her."

So much hard clarity all at once was a bit hard to react to. The young are so direct. I said, "To answer your last question, I don't know. Thank you for the observations which preceded it."

"I do love the way you talk, you're so precise, not like my father. He lives in a sort of rosy haze with Jesus and Mary and Buddha and Shiva and the Fisher King all chasing round and round dressed up as people in Chelsea."

This was such a good description of Arnold's work that I laughed. "I'm grateful for your advice, Julian."

"I regard you as my philosopher."

"Thank you for treating me as an equal."

She looked up at me, not sure if this was a joke. "Bradley, we will be friends, won't we, real friends?"

"What was the meaning of the air balloon?" I said.

"Oh, that was just a bit of exhibitionism."

"I pursued it."
"How lovely!"
"It escaped me."

"I'm glad it got lost. I was very attached to it."

"It was a sacrifice to the gods?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Mr. Belling gave it to you."

"Yes, how did--"I'm your philosopher."

"I really loved that balloon. I did sometimes think of letting it go, it was a sort of nervous urge. But I didn't know I'd cut the string--"Until you saw your mother in the garden."

"Until I saw you in the garden."

"I'll ring up--"Don't forget you're my guru."

I turned back into the court. When I got to the sitting-room Rachel moved towards me and enveloped me with a spontaneous yet planned movement. We swayed together, nearly falling over her piled macintosh upon the floor, and then slumped down onto Hart- bourne's armchair. She tried to nudge me back into the depths of the chair, her knee climbing over mine, but I kept her upright, holding her as if she were a large doll. "Oh Rachel, let us not get into a muddle."

"You cheated me out of those minutes. Whatever it is, we're in it. Christian just rang up."

"About Priscilla?"

"Yes. I said Priscilla was staying here. She said--"I don't want to know."

"Bradley, I want to tell you something and I want you to think about it. It's something I've discovered since I wrote you that letter. I don't really mind all that much about Christian and Arnold. I suddenly feel that it's sort of set me free. Do you understand, Bradley? Do you know what that means?"

"Rachel, I don't want a muddle. I've got to work and I've got to be alone, I'm just going to write a book I've been waiting all my life to write--"You look so Bradleian at this moment I could cry over you. We're not young and we're not fools. There'll be no muddle except for the one that Arnold makes. But a new world has come into being which is yours and mine. There will always be a place where we can be together. I need love, I need more people to love, I need you to love. Of course I want you to love me back, but even that's less important, and what we do isn't important at all. Just holding your hand is marvellous and makes my blood move again. Things are happening at last, I'm developing, I'm changing, think of all that's happened since yesterday. I've been dead for years and unhappy and terribly secretive. I thought I'd be loyal to him till the end of time, and of course I will be and of course I love him, that's not in question. But

loving him seemed like being in a box, and now I'm out of the box. Do you know, I think quite accidentally we may have happened upon the key to perfect happiness. I suspect one can't be happy anyway until one's over forty. You'll see how little drama there'll be. Nothing will change except the deep things.

I'm Arnold's wife forever. And you can go and write your book and be alone and whatever you want. But we'll each have a resource, we'll have each other, it will be an eternal bond, like a religious vow, it will save us, if only you will let me love you."

"But Rachel--this will be a secret--?"

"No. Oh, everything's changed so since even a little while ago. We can live in the open, there's nothing to be secretive about. I feel free, I've been set free, like Julian's balloon, I'm sailing up above the world and looking down at it at last, it's like a mystical experience. We don't have to keep secrets. Arnold has somehow forged a new situation. I shall have friends at last, real friends, I shall go about the world, I shall have you. And Arnold will accept it, he'll have to, he might even learn humility, Bradley, he's our slave. I've got my will back at last. We've become gods. Don't you see?"

"Not quite," I said.

"You do love me a bit, don't you?"

"Of course I do, I always have, but I can't exactly define--"Don't define! That's the point!"

"Rachel, I don't want to feel guilty. It would interfere with my work."

"Oh Bradley, Bradley--" She began to laugh helplessly. Then she drew her knees up again and threw the weight of her torso forward against me. We toppled over backwards into the chair with her mainly on top. I felt her weight and saw her face close to mine, leering and anarchic with emotion, unfamiliar and undefended and touching, and I relaxed and felt her body relax too, falling like heavy liquid into the interstices of my own, falling like honey. Her wet mouth travelled across my cheek and settled upon my mouth, like the celestial snail closing the great gate. As blackness fell for a moment I saw the Post Office Tower, haloed with blue sky, aslant and looking in at the window. (This was impossible, actually, since the next house blocks any possible view of the tower.)

"Of course you will. You are a chap who thinks."

"Rachel--"

"I know. You're going to tell me to go."

"Yes."

"I'm going. See how docile I am. Don't be frightened by anything I said. You haven't got to do anything at all."

"The unmoved mover."

"I'll run. Can I see you tomorrow?"

"Rachel, I'm so terrified of being tied by anything just now. You'll think me so mean and spiritless--I do care and I'm very grateful--but I've got to write this book, I've got to, and I've got to be worthy to--"I do respect and admire you, Bradley. That's part of it. You're so much more serious about writing than Arnold is. Don't worry about tomorrow or about anything. I'll ring you. Don't get up. I want to leave you sitting there looking so thin and tall and solemn. Like a-like a-Inspector of Taxes. Just remember, freedom, a new world. Perhaps that's just what your book needs, what it's been waiting for. Oh you're such a schoolboy, such a puritan. It's time for you to grow up and be free. Good-bye, Bradley. May your own god bless you."

She ran out. I stayed where I was, as she had told me to. I was greatly struck by what she had just said. I reflected upon it. Perhaps after all Rachel was the destined angel. How very peculiar it all was, and how brimful I was of sexual desire and how unusual this was.

I found that I was staring at the face of Francis Marloe. He had, I realized, been in the room for some time. He was making curious grimaces, closing up his eyes in a way that involved wrinkling his nose and dilating his nostrils. He looked, while doing this, as unselfconscious as an animal in the zoo. Perhaps he was shortsighted and was trying to focus on my face.

"Are you all right, Brad?"

"Yes, of course."

"You've got a funny look."

"What do you want?"

"Do you mind if I go out and have some lunch?"

"Lunch? I thought it was the evening."

"It's after twelve. There's only baked beans in the kitchen. Do you mind--"

"Yes, yes, go."

"I'll bring some light stuff in for Priscilla."

"How is she?"

"She's asleep. Brad--"Yes?"

"Could you give me a pound?"

"Here."

"Thanks. And, Brad--"

"What?"

"I'm afraid that bronze thing got broken. It won't stand up properly."

He thrust the warm bronze into my hand and I put it down on the table. One of the water buffalo's legs was crumpled. It fell over

lop-sidedly. I stared at it. The lady smiled. She resembled Rachel. When I looked up Francis was gone.

I went softly into the bedroom. Priscilla was sleeping high up on her pillows, her mouth open and the neck of her blouse pulling at her throat. Relaxed in sleep, a softer less peevish dejection made her face look a little younger. Her breath made a soft regular sound like "eschew... eschew..." She still had her shoes on.

Very gently I undid the top button of her blouse. The neck fell open, revealing the badly soiled interior of the collar. I eased off her shoes, holding them by the long pointed heels, and pulled the blankets over her plump sweat-darkened feet. The breathing-murmur ceased, but she did not waken. I left the room.

I went into the spare room and lay down on the bed. I thought about my two recent encounters with Rachel and how calm and pleased I had felt after the first one, and how disturbed and excited I now felt after the second one. Was I going to "fall in love" with Rachel? Should I even play with the idea, utter the words to myself? Was I upon the brink of some balls-up of catastrophic dimensions, some real disaster? Or was this perhaps in an unexpected form the opening itself of my long-awaited "break through," my passage into another world, into the presence of the god? Or was it just nothing, the ephemeral emotions of an unhappily married middle-aged woman, the transient embarrassment of an elderly puritan who had for a very long time had no adventures at all? Indeed it is true, I said to myself, it is a long time since I had an adventure of any sort. I tried to think soberly about Arnold. But quite soon I was conscious of nothing except a flaming sea of vague undirected physical desire.

It is customary in this age to attribute a comprehensive and quite unanalysed causality to the "sexual urges." These obscure forces, sometimes thought of as particular historical springs, sometimes as more general and universal destinies, are credited with the power to make of us delinquents, neurotics, lunatics, fanatics, martyrs, heroes, saints, or more exceptionally, integrated fathers, fulfilled mothers, placid human animals, and the like. Vary the mixture, and there's nothing "sex" cannot be said to explain, by cynics and pseudo-scientists such as Francis Marloe, whose views on these matters we are shortly to hear in detail. I am myself however no sort of Freudian and I feel it important at this stage of my "explanation" or "apologia," or whatever this malformed treatise may be said to be, to make this clear beyond the possibility of misunderstanding. I abominate such half-baked tosh. My own sense of the "beyond," which heaven forbid anyone should confuse with anything "scientific," is quite other.

I say this the more passionately because I think it just

conceivable that an obtuse person might mistake some of my attitudes for something of that sort. Have I not just been speculating whether Rachel's sweet unexpected affections might not set free the talent which I had so long known of, believed in, and nursed in vain? What sort of picture of me has my reader received? I fear it must lack definition, since as I have never had any strong sense of my own identity, how can I characterize sharply that which I can scarcely apprehend? However my own delicacy cannot necessarily cozen judgment and may even provoke it. "A frustrated fellow, no longer young, lacking confidence in himself as a man: of course, naturally, he feels that a good fuck would set him up, release his talents, in which incidentally he has given us no good reason to believe. He pretends he is thinking about his book, while really he is thinking about a woman's breasts. He pretends he is apprehensive about his moral uprightness, but really it is quite another sort of rectitude that is causing him anxiety."

It was not frivolous to connect my sense of an impending revelation with my anxiety about my work. If some great change was pending in my life this could not but be part of my development as an artist, since my development as an artist was my development as a man. Rachel might indeed be the messenger of the god. She was certainly confronting me with a challenge to which I would have to respond boldly or otherwise. It had often, when I thought most profoundly about it, occurred to me that I was a bad artist because I was a coward. Would now courage in life prefigure and even perhaps induce courage in art?

However, and this is just another way of putting my whole dilemma, the grandiose thinker of the above thoughts had to coexist in me with a timid conscientious person full of sensitive moral scruples and conventional fears. Arnold was someone to be reckoned with. If it should come to it, had I the nerve to provoke and to face Arnold's just anger? Christian was also someone to be reckoned with. I had not even begun to settle the matter of Christian in my mind. She prowled in my consciousness. / wanted to see her again. I even felt about her bright new friendship with Arnold an emotion which strongly resembled jealousy. Her vital prying faintly wrinkled face appeared in my dreams. Was Rachel strong enough to protect me from such a menace? Perhaps this was what it was all about, my search for a protector.

So I reflected, attempting to achieve calm. But by about five o'clock of that same day I was in a frenzy again, an obscure frenzy. What was this, love, sex, art? I felt that strong urge to do something, to act, which often afflicts people in unanalysable dilemmas. If one can only act, depart, return, send a letter, one can ease the anxiety

which is really fear of the future in the form of fear of the darkness of one's present desires: "dread," such as philosophers speak of, which is not so much really an experience of void as the appalling sense that one is in the grip of some very strong but as yet undeclared motive. Under the influence of this feeling I put my review of Arnold's book into an envelope and posted it off to him. But first of all I read it carefully through.

Arnold Baffin's new book will delight his many admirers. It is, what readers often and innocently want, "the mixture as before." It tells of a stockbroker who, at the age of fifty, decides to become a monk. His course is thwarted by the sister of his abbot-to-be, an intense lady returned from the East, who attempts to convert the hero to Buddhism. These two indulge in very long discussions of religion. The climax comes when the abbot (a Christ figure he) is killed by an immense bronze crucifix which accidentally (or is it accidentally?) falls upon him while he is celebrating mass.

Mr. Baffin is a fluent writer. He is a prolific writer. It may indeed be this facility which is his worst enemy. It is a quality which can be mistaken for imagination. And if the artist himself so mistakes it he is doomed. The writer who is facile needs, to become a writer of any merit, one quality above all; and that is courage: the courage to destroy, the courage to wait. Mr. Baffin, judging by his output, is incapable of either destroying or waiting. Only genius can afford "never to blot a line," and Mr. Baffin is no genius. The power of imagination only condescends to lesser men if they are prepared to work, and work consists very often of simply refusing all formulations which have not achieved the density, the special state of fusion, which is the unmistakable mark of art....

And so on for another two thousand words. When I had folded this up and posted it I felt a solid, but still rather mysterious, sense of satisfaction. My action would at least precipitate a new phase in our relationship, too long stagnant. I even thought it possible that this careful assessment of his work might actually do Arnold good.

That evening Priscilla seemed to be a little bit better. She slept all the afternoon and woke up saying she was hungry. However she took only a little of the clear soup and chicken which Francis had prepared. Francis, my view of whom was undergoing modification, had taken over the kitchen. He came back with no change from my pound, but with a fairly plausible account of how he had spent it. He had also fetched a sleeping bag from his digs and said he would sleep in the sitting-room. He seemed humble and grateful. I was busy stifling my misgiving about the risk of so "engaging" him.

For I had decided, though I had not yet told Priscilla, that I would shortly depart for Patara, leaving Francis in charge. That much

of the future I had settled. How Rachel would fit in was yet unclear. I imagined myself writing her long emotional letters. I had also had a long and reassuring conversation with my doctor on the telephone. (About myself.)

For the moment however behold me sitting with Priscilla and Francis. A domestic interior. It is about ten o'clock in the evening and the curtains are drawn.

Priscilla was again wearing my pyjamas, the cuffs liberally turned back. She was drinking some hot chocolate which Francis had made for her. Francis and I were drinking sherry.

Francis was saying, "Of course one's memories of childhood are so odd. Mine look all dark."

"How funny," said Priscilla, "so do mine. It's as if it's always a rainy afternoon, that sort of light."

I said, "I suppose we think of the past as a tunnel. The present is lighted. Farther back it gets more shadowy."

"Yet," said Francis, "we often recalled the remote past with greater clarity. I can remember going to the synagogue with Christian--"To the synagogue?" I said.

Francis was sitting cross-legged in a small armchair, filling it completely, looking like an image in a niche. His floppy wide-legged trousers were stiff with dirt and grease near to the turn-ups. The strained knees thereof were threadbare and shiny and hinted at pink flesh beyond the veil. His hands, podgy and also very dirty, were folded in his lap in a complacent position which looked faintly Oriental. He was smiling his red-lipped apologetic smile.

"Why, yes. We're Jewish. At least we're partly Jewish."

"I don't mind your being Jewish. Only oddly enough no one ever told me!"

"Christian is sort of, well, not exactly ashamed of it--or she was. Our maternal grandparents were Jewish. The other grandparents were goy."

"Rather funny about Christian's name, isn't it?"

"Yes. Our mother was a Christian convert. At least, she was the slave of our father, an awful bully. You never met our parents, did you? He wouldn't have anything to do with our Jewish background. He made our mother break off relations. Calling Christian 'Christian' was part of the campaign."

"Yet you went to the synagogue?"

"Only once, we were quite small. Dad was ill and we stayed with the grandpops. They were very keen for us to go. At least for me to go. They didn't care what Christian did, she was a girl. And her name disgusted them, though they did call her by her other one."

"Zoe. Yes. I remember her getting her initials C. Z. P. put on a

rather expensive suitcase--God."

"He killed my mother, I think."

"Who did?"

"My father. She was supposed to have died after falling downstairs. He was a very violent man. He beat me horribly."

"Why did I never know--Ah well--The things that happen in marriage--murdering your wife, not knowing she's Jewish--"Christian got to know a lot of Jews in America, I think that made a difference--I stared at Francis. When you find out that somebody is Jewish they look different. I had only after many years of knowing him discovered that Hartbourne was a Jew. He immediately began to look much cleverer.

Priscilla was restive at being left out of the conversation. Her hands moved ceaselessly, creasing the sheet up into little fanlike shapes. Her face was thickly patchily powdered. She had combed her hair. Every now and then she sighed, making a woo-woo-woo sound with a palpitating lower lip.

"Do you remember hiding in the shop?" she said to me. "We used to lie on the shelves under the counter and we'd think the counter was a boat and we were in our bunks and the boat was sailing? And when Mummy called us we'd just lie there ever so quietly--it was--oh it was exciting--"And the door with the curtain on it and we'd stand behind the curtain and when someone opened the door we'd move quietly back underneath the curtain."

"And the things on the upper shelves that had been there for years. Big old dried-up inkpots and bits of china that had got chipped."

"I often dream about the shop."

"So do I. About once a week."

"Isn't that odd. I always feel frightened, it's always a nightmare."

"When I dream about it," said Priscilla, "it's always empty, huge and empty, a wooden shell, counter and shelves and boxes, all empty."

"You know what the shop means, of course," said Francis. "The womb."

"The empty womb," said Priscilla. She made her woo-woo-woo sound and began to cry, hiding her eyes behind the large pendant sleeve of my pyjama jacket.

"Oh bosh," I said.

"No, not empty. You're in it. You're remembering your life in the womb."

"Rubbish! How could you remember that! And how could anyone ever prove it anyway? Now, Priscilla, do stop, it's time you went to sleep."

"I've slept all day--I can't sleep now--"You will," said Francis.
"There was a sleeping pill in your chocolate."

"You're drugging me. Roger tried to poison me--I motioned Francis away and he left the room murmuring, "Sorry, sorry, sorry."

"Oh, whatever shall I do--"Go to sleep."

"Bradley, you won't let them certify me, will you? Roger said once I was mad and he'd have me certified and shut up."

"He ought to be certified and shut up."

"Bradley, whatever will happen to me? I'll have to kill myself, there's nothing else to do. I can't go back to Roger, he was killing my mind, he was making me mad. He'd break things and say I'd done it and couldn't remember."

"He's a very bad man."

"No, I'm bad, so bad, I said such cruel things to him. I'm sure he went with girls. I found a handkerchief once. And I only use Kleenex."

"Settle down, Priscilla. I'll do your pillows."

"Hold my hand, Bradley."

"I'm holding it!"

"Is wanting to kill yourself a sign of going mad?"

"No. Anyway you don't want to kill yourself. You're just a bit depressed."

"Depressed! Oh if you knew what it's like to be me. I feel as if I were made of old rags, a corpse made of old rags. Oh Bradley, don't leave me, I shall go mad in the night."

"And the night-light. Bradley, do you think I could have a night-light?"

"I haven't got one and it's too late. I'll get one tomorrow. The lamp is just beside you, you can turn it on."

"At Christian's there was a fanlight over the door and the light shone in from the corridor."

"I'll leave the door ajar, you'll see the landing light."

"I think I'd die of terror in the dark, my thoughts would kill me."

"Look, Priscilla, I'm going into the country the day after tomorrow for a while to work. You'll be all right here with Francis--"No, no, no, Bradley, you mustn't leave me, Roger might come--"He won't come, I know he won't--"I'd die of shame and fear if Roger came--Oh my life is so awful, it's just so awful to be me, you don't know what it's like waking every morning and finding the whole horror of being yourself still there. Bradley, you won't go away, will you, I haven't anybody but you."

"All right, all right--"You promise you won't go, you promise--?"

"I won't go--not yet--"Say 'promise,' say it, say the word--"
'Promise.' "

"My mind's all hazy."

"That's sleep. Good night, there's a good girl. I'll leave the door ajar a little. Francis and I will be quite near."

She protested still, but I left her and returned to the sitting-room. Only one lamp was lit and the room was ruddy and dusky. There were murmurs from the bedroom, then silence. I felt exhausted. It had been a long day.

"What's that vile smell?"

"It's the gas, Brad. I couldn't find the matches."

Francis was sitting on the floor beside the glowing gas fire with the bottle of sherry. The level in the bottle had dropped considerably.

"Of course you can't remember being in the womb," I told him. "It's impossible."

"It isn't impossible. You can."

"Nonsense."

"We can remember what it was like when we were in the womb and our parents had sex."

"If you can believe that you can believe anything."

"I'm sorry I upset Priscilla."

"She keeps talking about suicide. They say if people talk about suicide they don't do it."

"That's not so. I think she could."

"Would you stay with her if I went away?"

"Of course, I'd only want board and lodging and a bit--"I can't go though. Oh God." I leaned back against one of the armchairs and closed my eyes. The calm image of Rachel rose before me like a tropical moon. I wanted to talk to Francis about myself, but I could only talk in riddles. I said, "Priscilla's husband is in love with a young girl. They've been lovers for ages. He's so happy now he's got rid of Priscilla. He's going to marry the girl. I haven't told Priscilla, of course. Isn't falling in love odd? It can happen to anyone at any time."

"So," said Francis. "Priscilla is in hell. Well, we all are. Life is torture, consciousness is torture. All our little devices are just morphia to stop us from screaming."

"No, no," I said, "good things can happen. Like, well, like falling in love."

"We're each of us screaming away in our own private padded cell."

"Not at all. When one really loves somebody--"So you're in love," said Francis.

"Certainly not!"

"Who with? Well, I know actually and can tell you."

"What you saw this morning--"Oh, I don't mean her."

"Who then?"

"Arnold Baffin."

"You mean I'm in love with--? What perfectly obscene nonsense!"

"And he's in love with you. Why has he taken up with Christian, why have you taken up with Rachel?"

"And every man in London is obsessed with the Post Office Tower, and--"

"Have you never realized that you're a repressed homosexual?"

"Look," I said, "I'm grateful to you for your help with Priscilla. And don't misunderstand me, I am a completely tolerant man. I have no objection to homosexuality. Let others do as they please. But I just happen to be a completely normal heterosexual--"One must accept one's body, one must learn to relax. Your thing about smells is a guilt complex because of your repressed tendencies, you won't accept your body, it's a well-known neurosis--"I am not a neurotic!"

"You're trembling with nerves and sensibility--"Of course I am, I'm an artist!"

"You have to pretend to be an artist because of Arnold, you identify with him--"I discovered him!" I shouted. "I was writing long before him, I was well-known when he was in the cradle!"

"Sssh, you'll wake Priscilla. The emotion rubs off on the women, but the source of the emotion is you and Arnold, you're crazy about each other--"I am not homosexual, I am not neurotic, I know myself--"Oh all right," said Francis, suddenly changing his posture and turning away from the fire. "All right. Have it your own way."

"You're just inventing this out of spite--"Yes, I'm just inventing it. I am neurotic and I am homosexual and I'm bloody unhappy about it. Of course you don't know yourself, lucky old you. I just know myself too bloody well." He began to cry.

I have rarely seen a man crying and the sight inspires disgust and fear. Francis was whimpering loudly, producing suddenly a great many tears. I could see his fat reddened hands wet with them in the light of the gas fire.

"Oh, cut it out!"

"All right, all right. Sorry, Brad. Forgive me. Please forgive me. I expect I just want to suffer. I'm a masochist. I must like pain or I wouldn't go on living, I'd have taken my bottle of sleeping pills years ago, I've thought of it often enough. Oh Christ, now you'll think I'm bad for Priscilla and boot me out--"Stop making that horrible noise, I can't bear it."

"Forgive me, Brad. I'm just a--"Try to be a man, try to--"I can't--Oh God--it's just the bloody pain--I'm not like other people, my life just doesn't work, it never has--and now you'll throw me out, and, oh God, if you only knew--"I'm going to bed," I said. "Have you got your sleeping bag here?"

"Yes, it's--"

"Well, get into it and shut up."

"I want to have a pee."

"Good night!"

"WL here's Arnold?"

"Gone to the library. So he says. And Julian's gone to a pop festival."

"I sent Arnold that review. Did he say anything?"

"I never see him reading his letters. He said nothing. Oh Bradley, thank God you've come!"

I hugged Rachel in the hall, behind the stained glass of the front door, beside the hall stand, next to the coloured print of Mrs. Sid-dons which I could see through the red haze of her hair. Still imprinted on my eyes was the vision of her broad pale face as she opened the door, crumpled into an ecstasy of relief. It is a privilege to be received in this way. There are human beings who have never been so welcomed. Something of Rachel's age, of her being wean. no longer young, was visible too and touching.

"Look, come upstairs."

"Rachel, I want to talk--"You can talk upstairs, I'm not going to eat you."

She led me by the hand, and in a moment we were in the bedroom where I had seen Rachel lying like a dead woman with the sheet over her face. As we came in Rachel pulled the curtains and then dragged the green silk counterpane off the bed. "Now, Bradley, sit down beside me."

We sat down rather awkwardly side by side and stared at each other. I felt the roughness of the blankets under my limp hand. The welcoming image had faded and I was rigid with confusion and anxiety.

"I just want to touch you," she said. And she did touch me with her finger tips, lightly touching my face and neck and hair, as if I were a holy image.

"Rachel, we must know what we're doing, I don't want to behau badly."

"Guilt would interfere with your work." She lightly closed my eyes with her finger tips.

I jerked away from her. "Rachel, you aren't just doing this to spite Arnold?"

"No. I think I started thinking about it, somehow out of self-defence, and then that awful time, you know, in this room, you were here, you were inside the barrier as it were, and I've known you so long, it's as if you had a special role, like a knight with a charge laid upon him, my knight, so necessary and precious, and I've always seen you a little as a wise man, a sort of hermit or ascetic--"And it always gives ladies particular pleasure to seduce ascetics."

"Perhaps. Am I seducing you? Anyway I've got to perform an act of will. Otherwise I shall die of humiliation or something. I feel it's a holy time."

"This could be a pretty unholy idea."

"It's your idea too, Bradley. Look where you are!"

"We are both conventional middle-aged people."

"I'm not conventional."

"Well, I am, I'm pre-permissive. And you are my best friend's wife. And one doesn't with one's best friend's wife--"

"What?"

"Start anything."

"But it's started, it's here, the only question is what we do with it. Bradley, I'm afraid I do rather enjoy arguing with you."

"You know where arguments like this end,"

"Between the sheets."

"God, we might as well be eighteen."

"They don't argue now."

"Look, is all this because Arnold is having an affair with Christian? Is he having an affair with Christian?"

"I don't know and it no longer matters."

"You still love Arnold, don't you?"

"Oh yes, yes, yes, but that doesn't matter either. He's just played the tyrant for too long. I must have new love, I must have love outside the Arnold-cage--"I suppose women of your age--'

"Oh don't start that, Bradley."

"I just mean, naturally one might want a change, but let's not do anything--"

"Bradley, with all your philosophy, surely you know that it doesn't really matter what we do."

I reflected. "Yes."

"Well, you must stop being. Oh my dear, don't you see that this is somehow the point? I must see you unafraid. This is what being my knight is. That will really let me out. And it will do something great for you too. Why can't you write? Because you're all timid and repressed and tied up. I mean in a spiritual way."

This was close to what I had thought myself. "Then are we to love each other in a spiritual way?"

"Oh Bradley, look, enough of this argument, let's undress."

All this time we had been sitting sideways facing each other, not touching, except when the tips of her fingers lightly tapped my face, then the lapels of my jacket, my shoulders and arms as if she were putting a spell upon me.

Rachel turned away, and in a single quick contorted movement peeled off her blouse and brassiere. Naked to the waist she now regarded me. This was a very different matter.

She was blushing and her face had become suddenly more tentative. She had very full round breasts with huge brown mandalas. The unclothed body wears a very different head from the clothed body. The blush extended down her neck and faded into the deep V of mottled sunburn which stained the flesh between her breasts. Her body had an air of unexhibited chasteness. I knew that this was a most unwonted gesture. And indeed it was a long time since I had seen a woman's breasts. I looked but did not move.

"Rachel," I said, "I am very touched and moved, but I really think this is most unwise."

"Oh stop it." She suddenly clasped my neck and rolled me back on the bed. There was a pushing and a scrambling and in a moment she was entirely naked beside me. Her body was hot. She was panting and her lips were against my cheek. She said, "Oh God."

"Bradley, undress."

"Rachel," I said, "I am, as I say, moved. I am very grateful. But I cannot make love to you. I don't mean I don't want to, I cannot. The machinery will not work."

"Do you always--have--difficulties?"

"'Always' has no force here. I haven't been with a woman for many years. This privilege is unwonted and unexpected. And I cannot rise to it."

"Undress. I just want to hold you."

I felt appallingly cool, still seeing myself. I took off my shoes and socks, my trousers, pants and tie. Some sort of self-protective instinct made me retain my shirt, but I let Rachel with hot trembling fingers undo the buttons. As I lay in her arms quite still and physically chilled, and her hands moved timidly about me, I saw above the haze of her hair through a gap in the curtains the leaves of a tree moving about in the breeze, and I felt that I was in hell.

"You're icy cold, Bradley. You look as if you're going to cry. Don't worry, my darling, it doesn't matter."

"It does matter."

"It'll be better next time."

There won't be a next time, I thought. And then I felt so overpoweringly sorry for Rachel that I really put my arms around her

and drew her up against me. She gave an excited little sigh.

"Then. 'Rachel! Hey, where are you?'" Arnold's voice below.

Like spirits of the damned pricked by the devil's fork we bounded up. I began scrabbling for my clothes which had got into a tangle on the floor. They appeared to be plaited into each other. Rachel had pulled on her blouse and skirt with no underclothes. She leaned on me as my hands still plucked vainly at inside-out trousers and her breath tickled my ear. "I'll take him down the garden." Then she was gone, closing the door behind her. I heard voices below.

I glided out and down the stairs and opened the front door. I pulled it to very softly after me but it would not close. I pulled it harder and it banged. I ran down the path and slipped upon some moss and came down with a crash. I staggered up and began to run away down the road.

At the end of the next road I was slowing down to a quick walk when, just as I rounded the corner, I cannoned straight into somebody. It was a girl dressed in a very short striped garment, she had bare legs and bare feet, she was Julian.

"So sorry. Oh Bradley, how super. You've been visiting the parents. What a shame I missed you. Are you going to the station? May I walk along with you?" She turned and we walked on together.

"I thought you were at a pop festival," I said, breathless, frantic with emotion, but concealing it.

"I couldn't get on the train. At least I could have done if I didn't mind being squashed, but I do, I'm a bit of a claustrophobe."

"So am I. Pop festivals are no places for us claustrophobes." I was speaking calmly, but now I was thinking: She will tell Arnold that she met me.

"I suppose not. I've never been to one. Now you're going to lecture me about drugs, aren't you?"

"No. Do you want a lecture?"

"I wouldn't mind one from you. But I'd rather it was on Hamlet. Bradley, do you think Gertrude was in league with Claudius to kill the king?"

"No."

"Do you think she was having an affair with Claudius before her husband died?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Too conventional," I said. "Not enough courage. It would have needed tremendous courage."

"Claudius could have persuaded her, he was very powerful."

"So was her husband."

"We only see him through Hamlet's eyes."

"No. The ghost was a real ghost."

"How do you know?"

"I just know."

"Then the king must have been an awful bore."

"That's another point."

"I think some women have a nervous urge to commit adultery, especially when they reach a certain age."

"Possibly."

"Do you think the king and Claudius ever liked each other?"

"There's a theory that they were in love. Gertrude killed her husband because he was having a love affair with Claudius. Hamlet knew of course. No wonder he was neurotic. There are lots of veiled references to buggery. 'A mildewed ear blasting his wholesome brother.' Ear is phallic and wholesome is a pun--"I say! Where can I read about it?"

"I'm teasing you. They haven't thought of that yet, even in Oxford."

I was walking fast and Julian had to give a little run every now and then to keep up. She kept turning towards me as she did so, performing a sort of dance beside me. I looked down at her bare brown very dirty feet executing these hops, skips and jumps.

We had nearly reached the place where I had seen her in the twilight tearing up the love letters, when I had at first taken her for a boy. I said, "How is Mr. Belling?"

"Please, Bradley--"Sorry."

"No, you know you can say anything you like to me. All that's over and done, thank God."

"Your balloon didn't come sailing back to you? You didn't wake up one morning and find it tied to your window?"

"No!"

At that moment Julian stopped outside the same shoe shop where I had parted from her on the previous occasion. "Oh I do adore those boots, the purple ones, I do wish they weren't so expensive!"

On impulse I said, "I'll buy them for you." I wanted to gain a little time to think of a suitably plausible way of asking her to keep quiet.

"Oh Bradley, you can't, they're far too much, how awfully kind of you but you can't--"

"Why not? It's ages since I gave you a present. I used to when you were little. Come on, be brave."

"Oh Bradley, I'd love it, and you're so kind, which is even better than the boots, but I can't--"Why not?"

"I haven't any stockings. I can't try them on with my feet like this."

"I see. I think incidentally that this barefoot cult is perfectly idiotic. Suppose you step on some glass?"

"I know. I think it's idiotic too, I won't do it again, it was just for the festival, it's terribly uncomfortable, my feet are hurting like anything already. Oh dear, what a shame though."

"Can't you buy some stockings!"

"There isn't a shop near--I had been fumbling in my pocket looking for my wallet. Suddenly as my hand emerged a pile of stuff fell out onto the pavement: my tie, underpants and socks. My face blazing with guilt, I swooped on them.

"Oh look, what luck, I could wear your socks. It's so warm, I don't wonder you took them off. May I, would you mind?"

She put them on immediately, balancing on each foot and holding on to my sleeve. We went into the shop.

It was cool and dim inside. Not at all like the nightmare shop that haunted my sister and myself; and not at all like the remembered interior of the womb either. More like the temple of some old unpassionate rather ascetic cult. The tiers of white containers (perhaps containing relics or votive gifts), the quiet darkly clad acolytes, the lowered voices, the rows of seats for meditation, the oddly shaped stools. The shoe horns.

We sat down side by side and Julian asked for her size. The black-clad girl began to ease the purple boot on over Julian's foot and my grey nylon sock. The high boot enveloped her leg and the zip fastener moved smoothly upward.

"It fits beautifully. May I try the other?" The other boot slid on.

Julian stood in front of the mirror and I looked at her reflection. The boots looked stunning on her. Above the knee there was a piece of bare thigh, only faintly brown, and then the blue-andgreenand-white striped hem of her brief dress.

Julian's delight was literally indescribable. Her face dissolved and glowed, she quite unconsciously clapped her hands, she rushed back to me and shook me by the shoulders and then rushed back to the mirror. Her innocent pleasure would have moved me very much upon a better occasion. Why had I thought of her as an image of vanity? This delight of the young animal in itself was something pure. I could not help smiling.

"Bradley, you do like them, they don't look absurd?"

"They look smashing."

"I'm so pleased, oh you are so sweet--Thank you so much!"

"Thank you. Present-giving is a form of self-indulgence." I asked for the bill.

"No, I won't wear them, it's too hot," Julian was explaining to

the sales girl. "Bradley, you are an angel. May I come and see you soon and we'll talk about Shakespeare? I'm free any time--Monday, Tuesday--how about Tuesday morning at your place at eleven? Or whenever you like?"

"All right, all right."

"And we'll talk seriously and look at the text in detail?"

"Yes, yes."

"Oh I am so pleased with the boots."

When we parted company at the station and I looked into those purely coloured blue eyes I could not bring myself to dim her joy by asking her to lie, even though I had by then thought of a fairly ingenious cock-and-bull story.

It was not until later that I remembered that she had gone away still wearing my socks.

Somehow or other it was twelve noon. Returning eastward to my flat I felt a good deal more sober, and I soon regretted my "high-minded" failure to silence Julian. Out of some ridiculous sense of dignity I had failed to take an absolutely essential precaution. When Julian blurted out about meeting me, what would Arnold guess, what would Rachel devise, what would she confess? Trying, and failing, to get the problem into focus I felt a guilty excited painful feeling not unlike sexual desire. Julian must be home by now. What was happening? Perhaps nothing. I felt an intense need to telephone Rachel at once, but knew that this would be profitless. "Knowing the worst" would have to wait awhile.

"Where's Priscilla?"

"Don't take on, Brad. She's back at my place."

Christian had taken off her shoes, which were lying on the bed. Her trim pearly-silky legs were neatly crossed. Legs are ageless.

"How dare you interfere!"

"I didn't, I just came to visit her, and she was so tearful and low and saying you were going to go away and leave her, so I said, 'Why not come back to me,' and she said she wanted to, so I sent her and Francis off in a taxi."

"My sister is not a sort of ping-pong ball."

"Don't be so cross, Brad. Now you can go away with a clear conscience."

"I don't want to go away."

"Well, Priscilla thought you did."

» "I'm going right away now to fetch her back."

"Brad, don't be silly. It's far better for her to be at Notting Hill. I've asked a doctor to see her this afternoon. Do leave her in peace for a bit."

"Did Arnold come to you this morning?"

"He came to see me. Why do you say 'come to you' in that meaningful way? He was very upset by your spiteful review. Why ever did you send it to him? Why cause pain just like that? You wouldn't like it if someone did it to you."

"Did he come to cry on your shoulder?"

"No. He came to discuss a business project."

"Business?"

"Yes. We're going into business together. I have a lot of spare money, so has he. I didn't spend all my time in Illinois at the Ladies' Guild. I helped Evans run his business. At the end I ran his business. I'm not going to idle around over here. I'm going into lingerie. And Arnold is going with me."

"Why did you never tell me you were Jewish?"

"You were never interested enough to find out."

"So you and Arnold are going to make money together. Has it occurred to you to wonder how Rachel might feel?"

"Aren't you after Rachel?"

"What makes you imagine that?"

"Rachel told Arnold you were."

"Rachel told Arnold I was after her?"

"Yes. They had a good laugh together."

"You're lying," I said. I left the room. Christian called after me, "Brad, let's be friends, please."

I had reached the front door with some general intention of going to fetch Priscilla and with a more immediate need to get away from Christian when the bell rang. I opened the door at once and there was Arnold.

He gave a well-prepared smile, apologetic, ironical, rueful.

I said, "Your business partner is here."

"So she told you?"

"Yes. You're going into lingerie. Come in."

"Hello, honey," said Christian behind me, welcoming Arnold. They trooped into the sitting-room, and after a moment's hesitation I followed them. Christian, who was still putting her shoes on, was wearing a handsome cotton dress of an exceptionally vivid shade of green. Of course I could see now that she was Jewish: that curvy clever mouth, that wily rounded-off nose, those veiled snaky eyes. She was as handsome as her dress, a queen in Israel.

I said to Arnold, "Did you know that she was Jewish?"

"Who? Christian? Of course. I found it out on our first meeting."

"How?"

"I asked."

"Brad thinks we're having some sort of romance," said

Christian.

"Look," said Arnold, "there's nothing between Chris and me except friendship. You've heard of that, haven't you?"

"It can't exist between a man and a woman," I said. I had only just, with sudden clairvoyance, realized this for certain.

"It can if they're intelligent enough," said Christian.

"Married people can't have friendships," I said. "If they do, they're faithless."

"Don't worry about Rachel," said Arnold.

"But I do, oddly enough. I felt very worried about her when I saw her the other day with a black eye you'd given her."

"I didn't give her the black eye. It was accidental. I explained to you."

"I'll go," said Christian, "but let me just make a little speech before I do. Gee, I'm sorry about all this. But honestly, Brad, you're living in a dream world. I was very emotionally disturbed when I got back here and I came straight to you. Some men would have been flattered. I may be over fifty but I'm not a has-been. I got three proposals of marriage on the boat, and all from people who didn't know I was rich. Anyway what's wrong with being rich? It's a quality, it's attractive. Rich people are nicer, they're less nervy. I'm quite a proposition. And I came to you. As it happened I met Arnold and we talked and he asked a lot of questions, he was interested. That makes people friends and we are friends. But we haven't started up a love affair. Why should we? We're too intelligent. I'm not a little girl in a mini-skirt looking for kicks. I'm a damned clever woman who wants to have fun for the rest of her life, real fun, and happiness, not just emotional messes. I guess I can see into my motivation by now. I was years in deep analysis back in Illinois. I want friendships with men. I want to help people. Do you know that helping people is the way to be happy? And I'm curious. I want to know lots of people and see what makes them tick. I'm not going to get stuck in any hole-and-corner dramas. I'm going to live in the open. And right out in the open is where Arnold and I have been. You just haven't understood. I want to be friends with you, Brad. I want us to redeem the past by our friendship, like sort of redemptive love--I groaned.

"Don't mock me, I'm trying, I know I may seem ridiculous--"Not in the least," I said.

"Well why not, naturally he was interested, and I was truthful. It's not a sacred subject, why shouldn't I talk about it. I guess you and I ought to try to be honest with each other and talk it all out of our systems. I know it would do me a power of good. Say, have you ever been analysed?"

"Analysed-- Certainly not!!"

"Well, don't be too sure it would be a waste of time. You seem pretty snarled up to me."

"Ask your friend to go, would you?" I said to Arnold. He smiled.

"I'm going, I'm going, Brad. Look, don't answer me now, but think about this. I do beg you most humbly, and I mean humbly, to talk to me sometime soon, to talk properly, talk about the past, talk about what went wrong, and do it not because it will help you but because it will help me. That's all. Think it over. See you."

She made for the door. I said, "Wait a minute. To someone who has spent years in deep analysis this may seem crude, but I simply do not like you and I do not want to see you."

"I know you're sort of scared--"I am not scared. I just happen to detest you. You are the sort of insinuating power-mongering woman that I detest. I cannot forgive you and I do not want to see you."

"I guess this sort of classical love-hate--"Not love. Just hate. Be honest enough to see that, since you're so intelligent. And another thing. When I have had my little talk with Arnold I am coming over to fetch my sister, and after that any connection between you and me ceases."

"Look, Brad, there's something more I want to say after all. I guess I see into your motivation--"Get out. Or do you want me to resort to violence?"

She laughed a red-tongued white-toothed laugh, merrily. "Oh-ho, what would that mean, I wonder? You'd better watch it, I learnt Karate at the Ladies' Guild. Well, I'm off. But think over what I said. Why choose hatred? Why not choose happiness and doing a little good to each other for a change? All right, all right, I'm off, cheery-bye."

She clacked out and I could hear her laughing as she pulled the front door to behind her.

I turned on Arnold, "I don't know what you think that Rachel--"

"No." The feeling of sheer loving pity for Rachel came back to me, no nonsense about legs, just pity, pity.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit. Rachel's all right. It's you who's getting all steamed up about me and Christian. Of course you naturally feel possessive about Christian--"I do not!"

"But there's really and truly nothing there except friendship. Rachel understands that now. You're the one who has invented this myth about me and your ex-wife. And you seem to be using it as an excuse for pestering Rachel in a way I might resent if I were more old-fashioned. Fortunately Rachel has a sense of humour about it. She told me how you came round this morning, accusing me and all ready to

comfort her! Of course I know, we all know, that you're keen on Rachel. Your being so has been an aspect of our friendship. You were keen on both of us. And don't misunderstand me, Rachel hasn't just regarded this as a joke, she's been very touched. Any woman likes a suitor. But when you start pestering her with attentions and suggesting I'm unfaithful at the same time it becomes something that she rightly won't put up with. I don't know whether you really think that Chris and I are lovers, or whether you pretend to Rachel that you think it. But she certainly doesn't believe anything of the sort."

Arnold was sitting with his legs straight out in front of him, balanced on the heels. A characteristic pose. His face wore the affectionate quizzical ironical expression which I had once liked so much.

I said, "Let's have a drink." I went to the walnut hanging cupboard.

I should of course have been, and in a way I was, relieved that the thing had been done so quietly. But I was also upset and annoyed and felt an impulse to shatter Arnold's complacency by showing him Rachel's letter. The letter was in fact lying on the Pembroke table, where I could even see the corner of the envelope protruding from under some papers. Naturally such treachery was not to be seriously envisaged. It is the woman's privilege to save herself at the man's expense. And though, as it seemed at that moment, whatever had happened had been Rachel's idea and not mine, I had to take full responsibility and suffer the consequences. I decided at once that I must not discuss or dispute the proffered view, but just pass the matter off as coolly as possible. It then came to me: but is Arnold lying? He could well be lying about Christian. Was he also lying about Rachel? What had passed between Arnold and his wife and would I ever know it for certain?

I looked at Arnold and found him looking at me. He seemed hugely amused. He looked well and strong and young, his lean greasy pale brown face had the look of a keen undergraduate. He looked like a clever undergraduate teasing his tutor.

"Bradley, it's true what I said about me and Chris. I care far too much about my work to indulge in muddles. And Christian is rational too. In fact she's the most rational woman I've ever met. What a grip on life that woman has!"

"Having a grip on life would be quite compatible with having a fling with you, I dare say. Anyway, as you have politely indicated, it's not my business. I'm sorry if I offended Rachel. I certainly wasn't intending to pester her with attentions. I was depressed and she was sympathetic. I'll try to be less disorderly. Can we leave it at that?"

"I read your so-called review with some interest."

"Why call it a so-called review? It's a review. I'm not going to publish it."

"You oughtn't to have sent it to me."

"True. And if it's any satisfaction to you I regret having done so. Could you just tear it up and forget it?"

"I've already torn it up. I thought I might be tempted to read it again. I can't forget it. Bradley, you know how vain and touchy we artists are."

"I know from my own case."

"I wasn't excluding you, for Christ's sake. We, you too. When one's attacked through one's work it goes straight into the heart. I don't mean that one bothers about journalists, I mean people one knows. They sometimes imagine that you can despise a man's book and remain his friend. You can't. The offence is unforgivable."

"So our friendship is at an end."

"No. Because in rare cases one can overcome the offence by moving much closer to the other person. I think this is possible here. But there are one or two things I must say."

"Go on."

"You, and you aren't the only one, every critic tends to do this, speak as if you were addressing a person of invincible complacency, you speak as if the artist had never realized his faults at all. In fact most artists understand their own weaknesses far better than the critics do. Only naturally there is no place for the public parade of this knowledge. If one is prepared to publish a work one must let it speak for itself. It would be unthinkable to run along beside it whimpering, 'I know it's no good.' One keeps one's mouth shut."

"Quite."

"I know I'm a second-rater."

"Uh-hu."

"I believe that the stuff has some merits or I wouldn't publish it. But I live, I live, with an absolutely continuous sense of failure. I am always defeated, always. Every book is the wreck of a perfect idea. The years pass and one has only one life. If one has a thing at all one must do it and keep on and on and on trying to do it better. And an aspect of this is that any artist has to decide how fast to work. I do not believe that I would improve if I wrote less. The only result of that would be that there would be less of whatever there is. And less of me. I could be wrong, but I judge this and stand by the judgment. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Also I enjoy it. For me writing is a natural product of joie de vivre. Why not? Why shouldn't I be happy if I can?"

"Why indeed."

"An alternative would be to do what you do. Finish nothing, publish nothing, nourish a continual grudge against the world, and live with an unrealized idea of perfection which makes you feel superior to those who try and fail."

"How clearly you put it."

"Bradley, don't be cross, our friendship has suffered because I'm successful and you aren't, I mean in a worldly way. I'm afraid that's true, isn't it?"

"Yep."

"Believe me, I'm not trying to make you angry, I'm in a quite instinctive way defending myself against you. Unless I do this reasonably effectively I shall feel deep resentment and I don't want to feel deep resentment. Isn't that sound psychology?"

"No doubt."

"Bradley, we simply mustn't be enemies. I don't only mean it would be nice not to be, I also mean it would be fatal to be. We could destroy each other. Bradley, do say something, for God's sake."

"You do like melodrama," I said. "I couldn't destroy anybody. I feel old and stupid. All I care about is getting my book written. There is a book, I care about that absolutely. The rest is rubble. I'm sorry I upset Rachel. I think I'd better leave London for a while. I need a change."

"Oh stop being so self-absorbed and quiet. Shout and wave your arms about! Curse me, question me. We must come closer to each other, otherwise we're lost. Most friendships are a sort of frozen and undeveloping semi-hostility. We've got to fight if we're going to love. Don't be cold with me."

I said, "I don't believe you about you and Christian."

"You're jealous."

"You're wanting to make me shout and wave my arms, but I won't. Even if you aren't making love to Christian, your 'friendship,' as you call it, must hurt Rachel."

"My marriage is a very strong organism. Any wife has moments of jealousy. But Rachel knows she's the only one. When you have slept beside a woman for years and years and years she becomes part of you, separation isn't possible. Wishful-thinking outsiders often tend to underestimate the strength of a marriage."

"I dare say."

"Bradley, let's meet again soon and talk properly, not about these nervy things, but about literature, like we used to. I'm going to write a critical reassessment of Meredith. I'd love to know what you think."

"Meredith! Yes."

"What Christian would call your motivation is dark to me."

"Don't take refuge in irony. God, I seem to be wooing you all the time now! Wake up, you're going along in a trance. We've got to wrestle into some sort of decent directness with each other. It's worth it, isn't it?"

"Yes. Arnold, would you go now? Do you mind? Perhaps I'm getting old, but I can't stand emotional conversations the way I used to."

"Write to me. We used to write to each other. Let's not stupidly mislay each other."

"O. K. I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too."

"Oh fuck off, for Christ's sake."

"Dear old Bradley, that's better! Good-bye then. Till soon."

I waited till I heard Arnold's footsteps well out of the court, then I rang the Baffins' number. Julian answered. I put the phone down at once.

I thought: What did they say to Julian?

Le knows you're with me?"

"He sent me to you."

It was the next morning and Rachel and I were sitting on a bench in Soho Square. The sun was shining and there was a dusty defeated smell of midsummer London: oily, grimy, spicy, melancholy and old. A number of tousled and rather elderly-looking pigeons stood around us, staring at us with their hard insentient eyes. Despairing people sat on other benches. The sky above Oxford Street was a sizzling unforgiving blue. Though it was still quite early in the morning I was sweating.

I said thoughtlessly, "Poor Rachel, oh poor Rachel."

She laughed with a kind of snarl, tugging at her hair. "Yes. Poor old Rachel!"

"Sorry, I--Oh hell--You mean he actually said to you, 'Go and see Bradley'?"

"Yes."

"But what words exactly did he use? People who aren't writers never describe things exactly."

"Oh I don't know. I can't remember."

"Rachel, you must remember. It can't be more than two hours since--"Oh Bradley, don't torture me. I just feel I'm being cut and scratched and ridden over by everything, I feel I'm under the plough."

"I know that feeling."

"I don't think you do. Your life is perfectly O. K. You're free. You've got money. You fuss about your work, but you can go away to the country or go abroad and meditate in some hotel. God, how I'd like to be alone in a hotel! It would be paradise!"

"'Fussing about one's work' can describe a kind of hell."

"All that's superficial, what's the word I want, frivolous. It's all--what's the word--"Gratuitous."

"It's not part of real life, of what's compulsory. My life is all compulsory. My child, my husband, compulsory. I'm caged."

"I could do with a few more compulsory things in my life."

"Rachel, I think you're raving. A striking simile, but really I never heard such tosh."

"Well, perhaps I'm just describing how it is with me and Arnold. I'm just a growth on him. I have no being of my own. I can't get at him. I couldn't do so even by killing myself. It would interest him, he'd have a theory about it. He'd soon find another woman he could get on with better, and they'd discuss my case."

"Rachel, these are very base thoughts."

"Bradley, how I adore your simplicity. As if I understood that language any more! You're talking to a toad, to an earthworm cut in two and wiggling."

"Rachel, do stop, you're upsetting me."

"You are a sensitive plant, aren't you. And to think that I saw you as a sort of knight errant!"

"Such a bedraggled one--"You were a separate place. Do you understand?"

"A wide plain where you could set up your tent? Or are these similes getting out of hand?"

"You mock everything."

"I don't, it's just a habit of speech. Surely you know me by now."

"Yes, yes, I do actually. Oh I've messed everything up. I've even spoilt you. Now Arnold has taken you over too. He cares for you far more than he cares for me. He takes everything."

"Rachel. Listen. My relation to you is not part of my relation to Arnold."

"Brave words. But it is now."

"Please try to remember what he said this morning, you know, when he asked you--"

"Oh how you do hurt and annoy me! He said something like, 'Don't feel you can't go and see Bradley now. In fact you'd better go and see him straight away. He'll be in a frenzy to see you and discuss our conversation. Why not go and see him and have a frank chat, have it all out. He'll talk more to you than to me. He's a bit sore and it'll do him good. Off you go.' "

"God. Does he think you'll report your conversation with me to him?"

"Maybe."

"And will you?"

"Maybe."

"Is Arnold having an affair with Christian?"

"You're in love with Christian."

"Don't be silly. Is Arnold--"

"I don't know. I'm getting bored with that question. Possibly not in the strict sense. But I don't care. He acts as a free man, he always has. If he wants to see Christian he sees her. They're going into business together. I couldn't care less whether they get into bed together too."

"Rachel, now do try to be more precise. Does Arnold really believe that I'm just pestering you against your will? Or did he invent that to smooth things over?"

"I don't know what he believes and I don't care."

"Please try. Truth does matter. What exactly happened yesterday after Arnold arrived back and we were--Please describe the events in detail. I want a description beginning, 'I ran down the stairs.'"

"I ran down the stairs. Arnold had gone out onto the veranda. So I dodged through the kitchen and into the side passage and then came into the garden as if I'd just seen him, and I took him down to the end of the garden to show him something and I kept him there and that seemed all right. Then about half an hour later Julian turned up and said she'd met you and you'd said you'd been at our place."

"I didn't say it. She assumed it and I didn't deny it."

"Well, that comes to the same thing. Then Julian started to talk about the boots you'd bought her. I must say I was rather surprised. You are a cool customer. Anyway, Arnold raised his eyebrows, you know the way he does. But he said nothing while Julian was with us."

"Wait a moment. Did Arnold notice that Julian was wearing my socks?"

"Ha! That's another thing. No, I don't think so. Julian went straight on upstairs to try the boots on. I didn't see her again till after Arnold had gone to see you. Then she explained about the socks. She thought it was a great joke."

"You see, I just shoved them in my pocket and--"All right, I imagined it all. Here they are, by the way. I washed them. They're still a bit damp. I told Julian not to mention you to Arnold for a while. I said he was so cross about that review. So I trust the sock incident is closed."

"He asked me why I hadn't said you'd been."

"What did you say?"

"What could I say? I was completely taken by surprise. I

laughed and said you'd annoyed me. I said you'd been rather emotional and I'd turned you out, and felt it would be kinder to you not to tell Arnold."

"Couldn't you think of anything better than that?"

"No, I couldn't. While Julian was there I couldn't think, and then I just had to say something. My head was full of nothing but the truth. The best I could do was to tell half of it in a garbled form."

"You could have invented a complete falsehood."

"So could you. There was no need to let Julian assume you'd been visiting us."

"I know, I know. Did Arnold believe you?"

"I'm not sure. He knows I'm a liar, he's often enough caught me in lies. He lies too. We accept each other as liars, most married couples do."

"Oh Rachel, Rachel--"

"You grieve over such an imperfect world, do you? Anyway he doesn't really mind. If I have some sort of thing on it eases his conscience and leaves him more free. And as long as he's in control and can bait you a bit it may even amuse him. He doesn't take you seriously as a threat to his marriage."

"I see."

"And of course he's quite right. There is no threat."

"Isn't there?"

"No. You've just played along out of vague affection and pity. Oh don't protest, I know. As for Arnold not taking you seriously as a libertine, that can hardly surprise you. The funny thing is, Arnold does care for you a lot."

"Yes," I said. "And the funny thing is that though I think in some ways he's a real four-letter man, I care for him a lot."

"So you see, the real drama is between you and him. I'm just a side issue as usual."

"No, no."

"I don't mean a literal wink, you fool. Ah well, my little bid for freedom didn't last long, did it. It ended in a sordid undignified scrabbling little muddle and Arnold taking over once again. Oh God, marriage is such an odd mixture of love and hate. I detest and fear Arnold and there are moments when I could kill him. Yet I love him too. If I didn't love him he wouldn't have this awful power over me. And I admire him, I admire his work, I think his books are marvellous."

"Rachel, you can't!"

"And I think that review of yours was spiteful and stupid."

"Well, well."

"You're just eaten up with envy."

"Let's not argue about that, Rachel, please."

"I'm sorry. I feel so sort of broken. I feel resentment against you for not having had the grace or luck to--rescue me or defend me or something. I don't even know what I mean. It isn't that I want to leave Arnold, I couldn't, I'd die. I just want a little privacy, a little secrecy, a few things of my own which aren't absolutely dyed and saturated with Arnold. But it seems to be impossible. You and he are going to start up again--"What a phrase!"

"You'll be talking your intellectual talk together and I'll be outside washing up and hearing your voices going on and on and on. It'll be just like the old days."

"Listen, dear Rachel," I said. "Why shouldn't you have a private place? I don't mean a love affair, neither of us has the temperament for that. I dare say I'm terribly repressed, not that I mind. And an affair would involve us in lies and would be wrong--"How simply you put it!"

"I don't want you to encourage you to deceive your husband--"I'm not asking you to!"

"We've known each other for years without ever coming really close. Now we suddenly blunder up against each other and it goes all wrong. We might now recede again to the previous distance or even farther. I suggest we don't. We can be friends. Arnold was holding forth about how he and Christian were friends--"Was he?"

"I suggest that you and I settle down to construct a friendship, nothing clandestine, all cheerful and above board--"Cheerful?"

"Why not? Why should life be sad?"

"I often wonder."

"Why shouldn't we love each other a bit and make each other happier?"

"I like your 'a bit.' You're such a weights-and-measures man."

"Let's try. I need you."

"That's the best thing you've said yet."

"Arnold could hardly object--"He'd love it. That's the trouble. Sometimes, Bradley, I wonder whether you have it in you at all to be a writer. You have such nai've views about human nature."

"When you will something a simple formulation is often the best. Besides, morals is simple."

"And we must be moral, mustn't we?"

"In the end, yes."

"In the end. That's rich. Are you going to leave Priscilla with Christian?"

This took me aback. I said, "For the present." I could not decide what to do about Priscilla.

"Priscilla is a complete wreck. You've got her on your hands

for life. I've had second thoughts about minding her, by the way. She'd drive me mad. Anyway, you'll leave her with Christian. And you'll go there to see her. And you'll start to talk with Christian and you'll start discussing how your marriage went wrong, just like Arnold said you ought to do. You don't realize how confident Arnold is that he's the centre of every complex. It's little people like you and me who are mean and envious and jealous. Arnold is so self-satisfied that he's really generous, it's real virtue. Yes, you'll come to Christian in the end. That's where the end is. Not morality but power. She's a very powerful woman. She's a great magnet. She's your fate. And the funny thing is that Arnold will regard it all as his doing. We are all his people. But you'll see. Christian is your fate."

"Never!"

"A muddler hoping to be forgiven. That sounds humble and touching. It would possibly be very effective in one of your books. But I've got a kind of misery that makes me blind and deaf. You wouldn't understand. You live in the open with all of you spread out around you. I'm mangled in a machine. Even to say it's my own fault doesn't mean anything. However don't worry too much about me. I expect all married people are like this. It doesn't prevent me from enjoying cups of tea."

"Rachel, we will be friends, you won't run away into remoteness? There's no need to be dignified with me."

"You're so self-righteous, Bradley. You can't help it. You're a deeply censorious and self-righteous person. Still, you mean well, you're a nice chap. Maybe later I shall be glad you said these things."

"Then it's a pact."

"All right." Then she said, "You know there's a lot of fire in me. I'm not a wreck like poor old Priscilla. A lot of fire and power yet. Yes."

"Of course--"You don't understand. I don't mean anything to do with simplicity and love. I don't even mean a will to survive. I mean fire, fire. What tortures. What kills. Ah well--"Rachel, look up. The sun's shining."

"Don't be soppy."

She threw her head back and suddenly got up and started off across the square like a machine which had just been quietly set in motion. I hurried after her and took her hand. Her arm remained stiff, but she turned to me with a grimacing smile such as women sometimes use, smiling through weariness and a self-indulgent desire to weep. As we neared Oxford Street the Post Office Tower came into view, very hard and clear, glittering, dangerous, martial and urbane.

"Oh look, Rachel."

"What?"

"The tower."

"Oh that. Bradley, don't come any farther. I'm going to the station."

"When shall I see you?"

"Never, I expect. No, no. Ring up. Not tomorrow."

"Rachel, you're sure Julian doesn't know anything about--anything?"

"Quite sure. And no one's likely to tell her! Whatever possessed you to buy her those expensive boots?"

"I wanted time to think of a plausible way of asking her to say she hadn't met me."

"You don't seem to have employed the time very profitably."

"No I--didn't."

"Good-bye, Bradley. Thanks even."

Rachel left me. I saw her disappear into the crowd, her battered blue handbag swinging, the plump pale flesh across her upper arm oscillating a little, her hair tangled, her face dazed and tired- with an automatic hand she had scooped up the hanging shoulder strap. Then I saw her again, and again and again. Oxford Street was full of tired ageing women with dazed faces, pushing blindly against each other like a herd of animals. I ran across the road and northwards towards my flat.

I thought, I must get away, I must get away • I must set away. I thought, I'm glad Julian doesn't know about all that. I thought, Maybe Priscilla really is better off at Notting Hill: thought, Perhaps I will go and see Christian after all.

As I now approach the first climax of my book let me pause, dear friend, and refresh myself once again with some direct converse with you.

Seen from the peace and seclusion of our present haven the events of these few days between the first appearance of Francis Marloe and my Soho Square conversation with Rachel **"

With these observations I introduce an analysis of my recent (as it were) conduct which I now wish, my dear, to deploy before you. As far as Rachel was concerned, I acted out of a mixture of rather graceless motives. I think the turning point was her emotional letter. What dangerous machines letters are. Perhaps it is as well that they are going out of fashion. A letter can be endlessly reread and reinterpreted, it stirs imagination and fantasy, it persists, it is red-hot evidence. It was a long time since I had received anything resembling a love letter. And the very fact that it was a letter and not a viva voce statement gave it a sort of abstract power over me. We often make important moves in our life in a de-individualized condition. We feel suddenly that we are typifying something. This can be a source of

inspiration and also a way of excusing ourselves. The intensity of Rachel's letter communicated self-importance, energy, the sense of a role.

Vanity and anxiety had involved me with Rachel, and envy (of Arnold) and pity and a sort of love and certainly an intermittent play of physical desire. As I have explained I was even then (and of course without any particular merit) generally indifferent to bodies. I experienced them involuntarily and without positively shuddering in crowded tube trains. But on the whole I did not now concern myself much with these integuments of the soul. Faces, of course, my friends had, but as far as I was concerned the rest could have been ectoplasm. I was not by nature a toucher or a starer. So it was that I was interested to find that I wanted to kiss Rachel, that I wanted, after a considerable interval, to kiss a particular woman. This was part of my excitement in the idea of playing a new role. In kissing her I had however no thought of proceeding further. What happened afterwards was just an unintentional muddle. Of course I did not disown it and I thought it might have serious consequences. And it did.

Christian's take-over of Priscilla, though utterly "obscene," was already becoming more of a problem than an outrage. I was more inclined to let the situation ride. Christian would get no profit from her hostage. But I did not think that she would therefore abandon or "drop" Priscilla. Perhaps here again I had been influenced by Arnold. In some people sheer will is a substitute for morality. What Arnold called "grip." When she was my wife Christian had employed this will in an attempt to invade and conquer me. A lesser man would have surrendered in exchange for a marriage which might even have been a happy one. One can see many men who live happily, possessed and run (indeed manned, the way a ship is manned) by women of tremendous will. What saved me from Christian was art. My artist's soul rejected this massive invasion. (It was like an invasion of viruses.) The hatred for Christian which I had nursed all these years was a natural product of my struggle for survival and its original spearhead. To overthrow a tyrant, whether in public or in private, one must learn to hate. Now however, no longer really threatened and with an incentive to be more objective, I could see how well, how intelligently, Christian had organized herself. Perhaps learning that she was Jewish had altered my vision. I felt almost ready for a new kind of contest in which I would defeat her casually. The final exorcism would be a display of cool amused indifference. But these were shadowy thoughts. The main point was that I now felt ready to trust Christian to be business-like and reliable about Priscilla, since I felt like being neither.

I have perhaps not even now sufficiently emphasized how

much I was dominated during this time by an increasingly powerful sense of the imminence in my life of a great work of art. This pellet irradiated each of the "frames" of my awareness in such a way that even when I was, for example, listening to Rachel's voice or looking at Priscilla's face, I was also thinking: The time has come. At least I was not thinking these words, I was not thinking anything in words: I was simply aware of a great dark wonderful something nearby in the future, magnetically connected with me: connected with my mind, connected with my body, which sometimes literally shook or swayed under that tremendous and authoritative pull. What did I imagine that the book would be like? I did not know. But I intuitively grasped both its being and its excellence. An artist in a state of power has a serene relationship to time. Fruition is simply a matter of waiting. The work announces itself, emerges often quite whole, when the moment comes, if the apprenticeship has been correct. (As the sage looks for years at the bamboo branch, then draws it quickly and without effort.) I felt that all I needed was solitude.

What the fruits of solitude are, my dearest friend, I know now very much better and more profoundly than I did then: because of my experiences and because of your wisdom. The person that I was then seems captive and blind. My instincts were true and my sense of direction was sound. Only the way turned out to be very much longer than I expected.

The mind, so constantly busy with its own welfare, is always sensitively filing and sorting the ways in which self-respect (vanity) has been damaged. In doing so it is at the same time industriously discovering methods of making good the damage. I had felt chagrined and ashamed because Rachel regarded me as a failed muddler, and Arnold was posing as having, in some unspecified sense, "found me out." (And, what was worse, "forgiven me"!) Reflection on what had happened was already repainting this picture. I was quite strong enough to "hold" them both, to comfort Rachel and to "play" Arnold. The sense of challenge involved already made my bruised vanity cease a little to droop.

I would console Rachel with innocent love. This resolution and the ring of the good word made me feel, on that momentous morning, a better man. But what rather preoccupied my thoughts was the image of Christian: her image rather than any definite proposition about her. These images which float in the mind's cave (and whatever the philosophers may say the mind is a dark cave full of drifting beings) are of course not neutral apparitions but already saturated with judgment, lurid with it. I still felt in waves my old poisonous hatred of this bully. I also felt the not very edifying desire beforementioned to erase, by a show of indifference, the undignified

impression which I had made. I had displayed too much emotion. Now instead I must stare with cold curiosity. As I practised staring at her charged and glowing image it seemed to be dissolving and changing before my eyes. Was I beginning to remember at last that I had once loved her?

I shook myself and closed the suitcase and snapped the catch to. If I could only get started on the book. A day of solitude, and I could write down something, a precious pregnant something like a growing seed. With that for company I could make terms with the past. And I was not now thinking of reconciliations or even of exorcisms, but just of the shedding of the load of sheer biting remorse which I had carried with me through my life.

The telephone rang.

"Hartbourne here."

"Oh hello."

"Why didn't you come to the party?"

"What party?"

"The office party. We specially put it on a day that suited you."

"Oh God. Sorry."

"Everyone was very disappointed."

"I'm terribly sorry."

"So were we."

"I--er--hope it was a good party all the same--"In spite of your absence it was an excellent party."

"Who was there?"

"All the old gang. Caldicott and Grey-Pelham and Dyson and Randolph and Matheson and Hadley-Smith and--"Did Mrs. Grey-Pelham come?"

"No."

"Oh good. Hartbourne, I am sorry."

"Never mind, Pearson. Can we make a lunch date?"

"I'm leaving town."

"Ah well. Wish I could get away. Send me a postcard."

"I say, I am sorry--"Not at all."

I put the telephone down. I felt the hand of destiny heavy upon me. Even the air was thickening as if it were full of incense or rich pollen. I looked at my watch. It was time to go to Netting Hill. I stood there in my little sitting-room and looked at the buffalo lady who was lying on her side in the lacquered display cabinet. I had not dared to try to straighten out the buffalo's crumpled leg for fear of snapping the delicate bronze. I looked where a line of sloping sun had made a flying buttress against the wall outside, making the grime stand out in lacy relief, outlining the bricks. The room, the wall,

trembled with precision, as if the inanimate world were about to utter a word.

Just then the doorbell rang. I went to the door. It was Julian Baffin. I looked at her blankly.

"Bradley, you've forgotten! I've come for my Hamlet tutorial."

"I hadn't forgotten," I said with a silent curse. "Come in."

"You're wearing the boots," I said.

"Yes. It's a bit hot for them, but I wanted to show them off to you. I'm so cheered up and grateful. Are you sure you don't mind discussing Shakespeare? You look as if you were going somewhere. Did you really remember I was coming?"

"Yes, of course."

"Oh Bradley, you are so good for my nerves. Everybody irritates me like mad except you. I didn't bring two texts. I suppose you've got one?"

"Yes. Here."

I sat down opposite to her. She sat sidesaddle on her chair, the boots side by side, very much on display. I sat astride on mine, gripping it with my knees. I opened my copy of Shakespeare in front of me on the table. Julian laughed.

"Why are you laughing?"

"You're so matter-of-fact. I'm sure you weren't expecting me. You'd forgotten I existed. Now you're just like a schoolteacher."

"Perhaps you are good for my nerves too."

"Bradley, this is fun."

"Nothing's happened yet. It may not be fun. What do you want to do?"

"I'll ask questions and you answer them."

"Go on then."

"I've got a whole list of questions, look."

"I've answered that one already."

"About Gertrude and--Yes, but I'm not convinced."

"You're going to waste my time with these questions and then not believe my answers?"

"Well, it can be a starting point for a discussion."

"Oh, we're to have a discussion too, are we?"

"If you have time. I know I'm lucky to get any of your time, you're so busy."

"I'm not busy at all. I have absolutely nothing to do."

"I thought you were writing a book."

"Lies."

"I know you're teasing again."

"Well, come on, I haven't got all day."

"Why did Hamlet delay killing Claudius?"

"Because he was a dreamy conscientious young intellectual who wasn't likely to commit a murder out of hand because he had the impression that he had seen a ghost. Next question."

"But, Bradley, you yourself said the ghost was real."

"I know the ghost is real, but Hamlet didn't."

"Oh. But there must have been another deeper reason why he delayed, isn't that the point of the play?"

"I didn't say there wasn't another reason."

"What is it?"

"He identifies Claudius with his father."

"Oh really? So that makes him hesitate because he loves his father and so can't touch Claudius?"

"No. He hates his father."

"Well, wouldn't that make him murder Claudius at once?"

"No. After all he didn't murder his father."

"Well, I don't see how identifying Claudius with his father makes him not kill Claudius."

"He doesn't enjoy hating his father. It makes him feel guilty."

"So he's paralysed with guilt? But he never says so. He's fearfully priggish and censorious. Think how nasty he is to Ophelia."

"That's part of the same thing."

"How do you mean?"

"He identifies Ophelia with his mother."

"But I thought he loved his mother."

"That's the point."

"How do you mean that's the point?"

"He condemns his mother for committing adultery with his fa-
"Wait a minute, Bradley, I'm getting mixed."

"Claudius is just a continuation of his brother on the conscious level."

"But you can't commit adultery with your husband, it isn't logical."

"The unconscious mind knows nothing of logic."

"You mean Hamlet is jealous, you mean he's in love with his mother?"

"That is the general idea. A tediously familiar one, I should have thought."

"Oh thai."

"That."

"I see. But I still don't see why he should think Ophelia is Gertrude, they're not a bit alike."

"The unconscious mind delights in identifying people with each other. It has only a few characters to play with."

"So lots of actors have to play the same part?"

"Yes."

"I don't think I believe in the unconscious mind."

"Excellent girl."

"Bradley, you're teasing again."

"Not at all."

"Why couldn't Ophelia save Hamlet? That's another of my questions actually."

"Because, my dear Julian, pure ignorant young girls cannot save complicated neurotic overeducated older men from disaster, however much they kid themselves that they can."

"I know that I'm ignorant, and I can't deny that I'm young, but I do not identify myself with Ophelia!"

"Of course not. You identify yourself with Hamlet. Everyone does."

"I suppose one always identifies with the hero."

"Not in great works of literature. Do you identify with Macbeth or Lear?"

"No, well, not like that--"Or with Achilles or Agamemnon or Aeneas or Raskolnikov or Madame Bovary or Marcel or Fanny Price or--"Wait a moment. I haven't heard of some of these people. And I think I do identify with Achilles."

"Tell me about him."

"Oh Bradley--I can't think--Didn't he kill Hector?"

"Never mind. Have I made my point?"

"I'm not sure what it is."

"Hamlet is unusual because it is a great work of literature in which everyone identifies with the hero."

"I see. Does that make it less good than Shakespeare's other plays, I mean the good ones?"

"No. It is the greatest of Shakespeare's plays."

"Then something funny has happened."

"Correct."

"I forbid you to take notes. You may not open the window. You may take off your boots."

"For this relief much thanks." She unzipped the boots and revealed, in pink tights, the legs. She admired the legs, wagged the toes, undid another button at her neck, then giggled.

I said, "Do you mind if I take off my jacket?"

"Of course not."

"You'll see my braces."

"How exciting. You must be the last man in London who wears any. They're getting as rare and thrilling as suspenders."

I took off my jacket, revealing grey army-surplus braces over a grey shirt with a black stripe. "Not exciting, I'm afraid. I would have

put on my red ones if I'd known."

"So you weren't expecting me?"

"Don't be silly. Do you mind if I take off my tie?"

"Don't be silly."

I took off my tie and undid the top two buttons of my shirt. Then I did one of them up again. The hair on my chest is copious but grizzled. (Or, if you prefer, a sable silvered.) I could feel the perspiration trickling down my temples, down the back of my neck, and winding its way through the forest on my diaphragm.

"You aren't sweating," I said to Julian. "How do you manage it?"

"I am. Look." She thrust her fingers in under her hair and then stretched her hands towards me across the table. The fingers were long but not unduly slim. They were faintly dewy. "Now, Bradley, where were we. You were saying Hamlet was the only--"Let's fold up this conversation shall we?"

"Oh Bradley, I knew I'd just bore you! And now I won't see you again for months, I know you!"

"Shut up. That dreary stuff about Hamlet and his ma and pa you can get out of a book. I'll tell you which one."

"So it's not true?"

"It is true, but it doesn't matter. A sophisticated reader takes such things in his stride. You are a sophisticated reader in ovo."

"In what?"

"Of course Hamlet is Shakespeare."

"Whereas Lear and Macbeth and Othello are--"Aren't."

"Bradley, was Shakespeare homosexual?"

"Of course."

"Oh I see. So Hamlet's really in love with Horatio--"Be quiet, girl. In mediocre works the hero is the author."

"My father is the hero of all his novels."

"It is this that induces the reader to identify. Now if the greatest of all geniuses permits himself to be the hero of one of his plays, has this happened by accident?"

"No."

"Is he unconscious of it?"

"No."

"Correct. So this must be what the play is about."

"Oh. What?"

"About Shakespeare's own identity. About his urge to externalize himself as the most romantic of all romantic heroes. When is Shakespeare at his most cryptic?"

"How do you mean?"

"What is the most mysterious and endlessly debated part of

his ceuvre?"

"The sonnets?"

"Correct."

"Bradley, I read such an extraordinary theory about the sonnets--'Be silent. So Shakespeare is at his most cryptic when he is talking about himself. How is it that Hamlet is the most famous and accessible of his plays?'"

"But people argue about that too."

"Yes, but nevertheless it is the best known work of literature in the world. Indian peasants, Australian lumberjacks, Argentine ranchers, Norwegian sailors, members of the Red Army, Americans, all the most remote and brutish specimens of mankind have heard of Hamlet."

"Don't you mean Canadian lumberjacks? I thought Australia--'How can this be?'"

"I don't know, Bradley, you tell me."

"Because Shakespeare, by the sheer intensity of his own meditation upon the problem of his identity has produced a new language, a special rhetoric of consciousness--'I'm not with you.'"

"Words are Hamlet's being as they were Shakespeare's."

"Oh what a noble mind is here o'erthrown."

"How all occasions do inform against me."

"Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice."

"Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I."

"Absent thee from felicity a while."

"I played Hamlet once," said Julian.

"What?"

"I played Hamlet once, at school, I was sixteen."

I had closed the book and had my two hands flat on the table. I stared at the girl. She smiled, and then when I did not, giggled and blushed, thrusting back her hair with a crooked finger. "I wasn't very good. I say, Bradley, do my feet smell?"

"Yes, but it's charming."

"I'll put the boots on again." She began to point one pink foot, thrusting it into its purple sheath. "I'm sorry, I interrupted you, please go on."

"No. The show's over."

"Please. What you were saying was marvellous, though I can't really understand much of it. I do wish you'd let me take notes. Can't I now?" She was zipping up the boots.

"No. What I was saying is no good for your exam. That's esoteric lore. You'd plough if you tried to utter that stuff. In fact you don't understand any of it. It doesn't matter. You'd better just learn a few simple things. I'll send you some notes and one or two books to

read. I know what questions they'll ask you and I know what answers will get you top marks."

"But I don't want to do the easy stuff, I want to do the difficult stuff, besides, if what you say is true--"You can't conjure with that word at your age."

"But I do want to understand. I thought Shakespeare was a sort of business man, I thought he was really interested in making money--"

"He was."

I got up. I felt suddenly exhausted, almost dazed, damp with sweat from head to foot as if I were outlined with warm quicksilver. I opened the window and a breath of slightly cooler air entered the room, polluted and dusty, yet also somehow bearing the half-obliterated ghosts of flowers from distant parks. A massed-up buzz of various noise filled the room, cars, voices, the endless hum of London's being. I opened the front of my shirt all the way down to the waist and scratched in my curly mat of grey hair. I turned to face Julian. Then I went to the walnut hanging cupboard and brought out glasses and the sherry decanter. I poured out sherry.

"So you played Hamlet. Describe your costume."

"Oh the usual. All Hamlets dress the same, don't they. Unless they're in modern dress, and we weren't."

"Do what I ask please."

"What?"

"Describe your costume."

"Well, I wore black tights and black velvet shoes with silvery buckles and a sort of black slinky jerkin with a low opening and a white silk shirt underneath that and a big gold chain round my neck and--What's the matter, Bradley?"

"Nothing."

"I thought I looked a lot like a picture I saw of John Gielgud."

"Who is he?"

"Bradley, he's an actor--"

"You misunderstand me, child. Go on."

"That's all. I enjoyed it ever so much. Especially the fight at the end."

"I think I'll close the window again," I said, "if you don't object." I closed it and the London buzz became indistinct, something internal, something in the mind, and we were alone again in a warm small thingy solitude. I stared at the girl. She was dreamy, combing her layers of greeny-golden hair with long fingers, seeing herself as Hamlet, sword in hand.

"Here thou incestuous murderous damned Dane--"Bradley, you must be a mind-reader. Look, do tell me something more about

what you were saying, couldn't you sort of put it in a nutshell?"

"Hamlet is a piece a clef. It is about someone Shakespeare was in love with."

"Oh you are a tease. They're much as usual. Dad's out at the library all day, scribble, scribble, scribble. Mum stays at home and moves the furniture about and broods. It's such a pity she never had any education. She's so intelligent."

"Don't be so bloody sorry for them," I said. "They're marvellous people, both of them, marvellous people with real private lives of their own."

"Sorry. I must have sounded awful. I suppose I am awful. Perhaps all young people are awful."

"Lay not that flattering unction to your soul. Only some."

"Sorry, Bradley. I say, I do wish you'd come and see the parents oftener, I think you do them good."

I felt some shame in asking her about Arnold and Rachel, but I wanted to be, and now was, sure that they had said nothing damaging about me.

"So you want to be a writer?" I said. I was still leaning back against the window. She was pointing her alert secretive little face at me. With her mane of hair she looked more like a nice dog than like Royal Denmark. She had crossed her legs now, one lying horizontal upon the other, showing off the purple boots and a maximum amount of pink tights. Her hand played at her neck, opening another button, questing within. I could smell her sweat, her feet, her breasts.

"I feel I can. I'm ready to wait. I won't rush into it. I want to write hard dense impersonal sort of books, not a bit like me."

"Good girl."

"I certainly won't call myself Julian Baffin--"Julian," I said. "I think you'd better go."

"I'm so sorry--Oh Bradley, I have enjoyed this. Do you think we could meet again before long? I know you hate to be tied down. Aren't you going away?"

"No."

"Then please let me know sometime if we can meet."

"Yes."

"Well, I suppose I must be off--"I owe you a thing."

"What?"

"A thing. In return for the buffalo lady. Remember?"

"Yes. I didn't like to remind you--"Here."

I took two strides to the chimney piece and picked up a little oval gilt snuffbox, one of my most treasured pieces. I gave it into her hand.

"Oh Bradley, how frightfully kind of you, it looks so sort of

elegant and valuable, and something's written on it, A Friend's Gift, oh my dear, how nice! We are friends, aren't we?"

"Yes."

"Bradley, I am grateful--"Off you go. Out, out."

"You won't forget all about me--?"

"Out."

I saw her to the front door and closed it immediately after her as soon as she had stepped outside it. I went back into the flat, into the sitting-room, and closed the door. The room was sweet with heavy dusty sunlight. Her chair was where it had been. She had left her copy of Hamlet behind on the table.

I fell on my knees and then lay full-length face downwards on the rug in front of the fireplace. Something very extraordinary indeed had just happened to me.

Part Two

What it was that had happened the percipient reader will not need to be told. (Doubtless he saw it coming a mile off. I did not. This is art, but I was out there in life.) I had fallen in love with Julian. At what point during our conversation I realized this fact is hard to determine. The consciousness darts back and forth in time like a weaver and can occupy, when busy with its mysterious self-formings and self-gatherings, a very large specious present. Perhaps I realized it when she said, in that beautiful resonant tone of hers, "Since my dear soul was mistress of her choice." Perhaps it was when she said, "Black tights and black velvet shoes with silvery buckles." Or perhaps it was when she took her boots off. No, not as early as that. And when I had had that mystical experience, looking at her legs in the shoe shop, had that been a veiled realization of being in love? It had not seemed so. Yet that too was part of it. Everything was part of it. After all, I had known this child since her birth. I had seen her in her cradle, I had held her in my arms when she was twenty inches long. Oh Christ.

"I had fallen in love with Julian." The words are easily written down. But how to describe the thing itself? It is odd that falling in love, though frequently mentioned in literature, is rarely adequately described. It is after all an astounding phenomenon and for most people it is the most astonishing event that ever happens to them: more astonishing, because more counter-natural, than life's horrors. (I do not of course refer to mere "sex.") It is sad that, like the experience of bereavement, the experience of love is usually, like a dream, forgotten. Furthermore, those who have never fallen desperately in love with someone whom they have known for a long time may doubt whether this can occur. Let me assure them that it can.

It happened to me. Was it always there cooking, incubating, in the warm inwards of time, as the girl grew and filled out into bloom? Of course I had always liked her, especially when she was a little child. But nothing really had prepared me for this blow. And it was a blow, I was felled by it physically. I felt as if my stomach had been shot away, leaving a gaping hole. My knees dissolved, I could not stand up, I shuddered and trembled all over, my teeth chattered.

My face felt as if it had become waxen and some huge strange weirdly smiling mask had been imprinted upon it, I had become some sort of God. I lay there with my nose stuck into the black wool of the rug and the toes of my shoes making little ellipses on the carpet as I shook with possession. Of course I was sexually excited, but what I felt transcended mere lust to such a degree that although I could vividly sense my afflicted body I also felt totally alienated and changed and practically discarnate.

Of course the mind of the lover abhors accident. "I wonder by my troth what thou and I did till we loved" is a question intimate to his amazement. My love for Julian must have been figured before the world began. Surely it was lovers who discovered astrology. Nothing less than the great chamber of the stars could be large and steady enough to be context, origin and guarantee of something so eternal. I realized now that my whole life had been determinedly travelling towards this moment. Her whole life had been travelling towards it, as she played and read her school books and grew and looked in the mirror at her breasts. This was a predestined collision. But it had not only just happened, it had happened aeons ago, it was of the stuff of the original formation of earth and sky. When God said, "Let there be light," this love was made. It had no history. Yet too my awakening consciousness of it had a history of bottomless fascination. When, how, did I begin to realize the charm of this girl? Love generates, or rather reveals, something which may be called absolute charm. In the beloved nothing is gauche. Every move of the head, every tone of the voice, every laugh or grunt or cough or twitch of the nose is as valuable and revealing as a glimpse of paradise. And in fact lying there absolutely limp and yet absolutely taut with my brow on the ground and my eyes closed I was actually not just glimpsing but in paradise. The act of falling in love, of really falling in love (I do not mean what sometimes passes by this name), floods the being with immediate ecstasy.

The rather flowery ideas which I have set out above were not of course as such at all clear in my mind while I was sitting on the floor hugging the chair which she had sat in. (I did this too for some considerable time: perhaps until the evening.) I was, for that period, largely dazed with happiness: joy in my marvellous achievement of absolute love. In this blaze of light of course a few more mundane thoughts flitted to and fro like little birds, scarcely descried by one who was dazzled by emergence from the cave. I will mention here two of these thoughts since they are germane to events which happened later. They were, I should say, not posterior to my discovery of being in love: they were innate in it and born with it.

I spoke earlier in this rigmarole of my whole life as travelling

towards what had now occurred. Perhaps my friend the percipient reader may be excused for having interpreted this conception in the following terms: that all this dream of being a great artist was simply a search for a great human love. Such things have been known, indeed such discoveries are common, especially among women. Love can soon dim the dream of art and make it seem secondary, even a delusion. I should say at once that this was not my case. Of course since everything was now connected with Julian, my ambitions as a writer were connected with Julian. But they were not cancelled thereby. Rather something more like the opposite seemed to be happening. She had filled me with a previously unimaginable power which I knew that I would and could use in my art. The deep causes of the universe, the stars, the distant galaxies, the ultimate particles of matter, had fashioned these two things, my love and my art, as aspects of what was ultimately one and the same. They were, I knew, from the same source. It was under the same orders and recognizing the same authority that I now stood, a man renewed. Of this conviction I will speak more and explain more later.

Nor did I envisage suffering. "I will run the gauntlet of a thousand blows but I will keep my mouth shut." No. To the pure lover in his moments of purity the idea of suffering is vulgar, it portends the return of self. What I rather felt was a dazzled gratitude. Yet I understood at once in a clear intellectual way that I could not ever tell Julian that I loved her. The details of this certainty (what it involved) became clearer to me later, but it stood flaming in my way at the very start. I was fifty-eight, she was twenty. I could not puzzle, burden and bedevil her young life with the faintest hint or glimpse of this huge terrible love. How fearful that dark shadow is when we catch sight of it in the life of another. No wonder those at whom that black arrow is aimed so often turn and flee. How unendurable it can be, the love another bears us. I would never persecute my darling with that dread knowledge. From now onward until the world ended everything must remain, although utterly changed, exactly as it was before.

The reader, especially if he has not had the experience I have been describing, may feel impatient with the foregoing lyricism. "Pshaw!" he will say, "the fellow protests too much and intoxicates himself with words. He admits to being a thoroughly repressed man, no longer young. All he means is that he suddenly felt intense sexual desire for a girl of twenty. We all know about that." I will not pause to answer this reader back, but will go on as faithfully as I can to recount what happened next.

I got up and shaved. What physical pleasure there is in shaving when a man is happy! I examined my face in the mirror. It looked fresh and young. The waxen imprint was still upon it. I really

did look a different person. A radiant force from within had puffed out my cheeks and smoothed the wrinkles round my eyes. I dressed with care and took some time to select a tie. Eating was still, of course, out of the question. I felt as if I should never need to eat again, but could live indefinitely simply by breathing. I drank a little water. I squeezed an orange, more out of a theoretical idea that I should nourish myself than because of any return of appetite, but the juice was too rich and heavy, I could not even sip it. Then I went into the sitting-room and dusted it a little. At least I dusted a few visible surfaces. As a lifelong Londoner, I am easily tolerant of dust. The sun had not yet come round to the position whence it could illuminate the brick wall opposite, but there was so much sunny brightness in the sky that the room was glowing in a subdued way. I sat down and wondered what I was going to do with my new life.

I spent some time examining the book and culling these flowers. Then hugging it against my shirt, I began to meditate. It had not ceased to be clear that my new "occupation" was not in any sense an alternative to my life's work. The same agency had sent me both these things, not to compete but to complete. I would soon be writing and I would write well. I do not mean that I thought of anything so vulgar as writing "about" Julian. Life and art must be kept strictly separate if one is aiming at excellence. But I felt those dark globules in the head, those tinglings in the fingers which token the advent of inspiration. The children of my fancy were already hosting. Meanwhile however there were simpler tasks to be performed. I must set my life in order and I now had the strength to do so. I must see Priscilla, I must see Roger, I must see Christian, I must see Rachel, I must see Arnold. (How easy it all suddenly looked!) I did not say to myself, "I must see Julian," and over that divine lacuna I gazed out with wide peaceful eyes at a world devoid of evil. There seemed to be no question, at the moment, of leaving London. I would perform my tasks and I would not lift a finger to see my darling again. And I felt, as I meditated upon her, glad to think that I had so immediately given her one of my best treasures, the gilt snuffbox, A Friend's Gift. I could not have given it to her now. This innocent thing had gone away with her, a pledge, did she but know it, of a love dedicated in silence to her quite separate and private happiness. Out of this silence I would forge my power. Yes, this was a yet clearer revelation and I held onto it. I would be able to create because I would be able to keep silent.

After I had been brooding upon this truly awe-inspiring insight for some time my heart suddenly nearly fell out of me because the telephone rang and I thought it might be her.

"Yes?"

"Hartbourne here."

"Oh hello, my dear fellow!" I felt a sort of cordial relief though I could hardly still breathe with excitement. "I'm so glad you rang. Look, let's meet soon, how about lunch--could you manage lunch today?"

"Today? Well, yes, I think I could actually. Shall we say one o'clock at the usual place?"

"Yes, that's fine! I'm afraid I'm on a diet by the way, and won't be able to eat much, but I'd love to see you, I do look forward to it." I put the phone down smiling. Then the front doorbell rang.

My heart performed the same swoop into emptiness. I scrabbled at the door, almost moaning.

Rachel stood outside.

When I saw her I came straight out of the flat and closed the door behind me and said, "Oh Rachel, how marvellous to see you! I'm just going to do some urgent shopping, would you like to walk along with me?" I did not want to let her in. She might have gone into the sitting-room and sat down on Julian's tiger lily chair. Also I felt I must talk to her unintimately, out in the open air. I was glad to see her.

"Can't I come in and sit down for a minute?" she said.

"I must have a breath of air, do you mind? It's such a lovely day. Come along then."

I set off along the court and then along Charlotte Street, walking rather fast.

Rachel was dressed more smartly than usual in a silky dress with red and white blotches on it and a low square neckline. Her collarbones, sun-brown and mottled, were prominent above the dress. Her neck was dry and wrinkled, faintly reptilian, her face was smoother, more made-up than usual, and wearing the expression the French call maussade. She seemed to have lately washed her hair which made a smooth frizzy ball around her head. She looked, in spite of parts of the above description, a handsome woman, tired, but not defeated, by her life.

"Bradley, don't walk so fast."

"Sorry."

"Before I forget, Julian said would I pick up her copy of Hamlet which she left with you."

I had no intention of parting with this book. I said, "I'd like to keep it for a while. It's rather a good edition, and I wanted to note one or two things."

"But it's a school book."

"Excellent edition all the same. Not available any more." Later I would feign to have lost it.

"It was so kind of you to see Julian yesterday."

"I enjoyed it."

"I hope she hasn't been pestering you."

"Not at all. Here we are."

I dashed among the shelves followed by Rachel. "I must buy some more of my special notebooks. I'm going to be doing a lot of writing soon. Rachel, let me buy you something, I must, I'm in a present-giving mood."

"Bradley, whatever is the matter with you, you seem quite delirious."

"Here, let me give you these nice things!" I had to load somebody with presents. I collected for Rachel a ball of red string, a blue felt tipped pen, a pad of special calligrapher's paper, a magnifying glass, a fancy carrier bag, a large wooden clothes peg with urgent written on it in gold, and six postcards of the Post Office Tower. I paid for the purchases and loaded the bag with all Rachel's spoils into her arms.

"You seem in a good mood!" She said, pleased, but still a bit maussade. "Now can we go back to your place?"

"I'm awfully sorry, I've got a rather early lunch engagement, I'm not going back." I was still worrying about the chair and whether she wouldn't try again to remove the book. It was not that I was unwilling to talk to Rachel, I was greatly enjoying it.

"Well, let's sit somewhere."

"There's a seat in Tottenham Court Road, just opposite Heals."

"Bradley, I am not going to sit in Tottenham Court Road and contemplate Heals. Aren't the pubs open yet?"

They were. I must have spent longer than I realized in meditation. We went into one.

It was a featureless modern place, ruined by the brewers, all made of light plastic (pubs should be dark holes) but with the sun shining in and the street door open it had a sort of southern charm. We visited the bar and then sat at a plastic table which was already wet with beer. Rachel had a double whisky which she proposed to drink neat. I had a lemonade shandy for the sake of appearances. We looked at each other.

It occurred to me that this was the first time since I had been smitten that I had looked another human being in the eyes. It was a good experience. I beamed. I almost felt that my face had the power to bless.

"Bradley, you are looking odd."

"Peculiar?"

"Very nice. You look awfully well today. You look younger."

"Dear Rachel! I'm so glad to see you. Tell me all. Let's talk about Julian. Such an intelligent girl."

"I'm glad you think so. I'm not sure that I do. I'm grateful to

you for taking an interest in her at last."

"At last?"

"She says she's been trying to attract your attention for years. I warned her you probably won't keep it up."

"I'll do what I can for her. I like her, you know." I laughed crazily.

"She's like all of them now, so vague and inconsiderate and doing everything on the spur of the moment, and so full of contempt for everything. She adores her father but she can't help needling him all the time. She told him this morning that you thought his work was 'sentimental.' "

"Rachel, I've been thinking," I said. (I had not in fact, it had just come into my head.) "I may be being completely unjust to Arnold. It's years since I read the whole of his work, I must read it all through again, I may see it quite differently now. You like Arnold's novels, don't you?"

"I'm his wife. And I'm a totally uneducated woman, as my dear daughter never tires of telling me. But look, I don't want to talk about these things. I want to say--well, first of all forgive me for bothering you again. You'll begin to think I'm a neurotic woman with a fixation."

"Never, my dear Rachel! I'm so glad to see you. And what a pretty dress! How charming you look!"

"Yes, my dearest creature."

"You said some very kind and probably very wise things last time we met about friendship. I feel I was rather churlish--"Not at all."

"I want to say now that I accept and need your friendship. I also want to say--it's hard to find the words--I'd be wretched if I felt you just saw me as a desperate middle-aged harpy trying to pull someone into bed to spite her husband--"I assure you--"It's not like that, Bradley. There's something I feel I didn't make absolutely clear. I wasn't just looking for a man to console me after a married row--"You did make it clear--"It could only have been you. We've known each other for centuries. But it's only lately come to me--how much I really care about you. You're a very special person in my life. I esteem you and admire you and rely on you and--well, I love you. That's what I wanted to say."

"Rachel, what a delightful thing, it's made my day!"

"Be serious for a moment, Bradley."

"I am serious, my dear. People should love each other more in simple ways, I've always felt this. Why can't we just comfort each other more? One tends to live at a sort of level of anxiety and resentment where one's protecting oneself all the time. Climb above it, climb above it, and feel free to love! That's the message. I know in my

relations with Arnold--"Never mind your relations with Arnold. This is about me. I want--I must be a bit drunk--let me put it crudely--I want a special relationship with you."

"You've got it!"

"Be quiet. I don't want an affair, not because I don't want an affair, maybe I do, it's not worth finding out, but because it would be a mess and belong with all that anxiety and resentment you were talking about, anyway you haven't got the guts or temperament or whatever for an affair, but Bradley, I want you."

"You've got me!"

"Oh don't be so gay and flippant, you look so horribly pleased with yourself, what's the matter?"

"I wish I could hold you to some sort of seriousness, you're so terribly sort of slippery today. Bradley, this matters so much--you will love me, you will be faithful?"

"Yes!"

"A real true friend to me forever?"

"Yes, yes!"

"I don't know--thank you--all right--You're looking at your watch, you must go to your lunch date. I'll stay here and--think--and--drink. Thank you, thank you."

The last I saw of her, through the window as I went off, she was staring at the table and very slowly making patterns in the beer drips with her finger. Her face had a heavy sullen dreamy remembering look which was very touching.

Hartbourne asked after Christian. He had known her slightly. The news of her return must have somehow got around. I talked about her frankly and at ease. Yes, I had seen her. She was much improved, not only in looks. We were on quite good terms, very civilized. And Priscilla? She had left her husband and was staying with Christian, I was just going to visit them. "Priscilla staying with Christian? How remarkable," said Hartbourne. Yes I suppose it was, but it just showed what good friends we all were. In turn I asked Hartbourne about the office. Was that ridiculous committee still sitting? Had Matheson got his promotion yet? Had the new lavatories materialized? Was that comic tea lady still around? Hart- bourne remarked that I seemed "very fit and relaxed."

"And the poems, sir?"

"Yes." I had not even realized that Arnold had published any poems. What a skunk I was! I also purchased the London edition of Shakespeare complete in six volumes, to give to Julian in exchange for her Hamlet when the time came, and I went away still smiling.

As I was just turning into the court I saw Rigby, my upstairs neighbour. I stopped him and had begun some cordial conversation

about the fine weather when he said, "There's someone waiting outside your door." I gasped and excused myself and quickly ran. A man, however, was awaiting me. A well-dressed distinguished-looking figure with a soldierly air.

When he saw me Roger started to say, "Look here, before you tell me--" My dear Roger, come in and have some tea. Where's Marigold?"

"I left her in a sort of cafe down there."

"Well, go and get her at once, go on, I'd love to see her again! I'll be putting the kettle on and putting the tea things out."

Roger stared and shook his head as if he thought I must be mad, but he went off all the same to fetch Marigold.

Marigold was looking very dressed-up for town with a little blue linen cap and a white linen pinafore dress and a dark-blue silk blouse and a rather expensive-looking red-white-and-blue scarf. She looked a bit like a musical-comedy sailor girl. She was rounder however and had the self-conscious self-satisfied pouting stance of the pregnant woman. Her tanned cheeks were deeply ruddy with health and happiness. She smiled all the time with her eyes and one simply could not help smiling back. She must have left a trail of happiness behind her down the street.

"Marigold, how lovely you look!" I said.

"What's your game?" said Roger.

"Sit down, sit down, please forgive me, it's just that you both look so happy, I can't help myself. Marigold, will you be mother?"

"I suppose this is some sort of sick joke?"

"No, no--" I was serving tea on the mahogany night table. I had put Julian's chair well back out of the way.

"You'll be turning nasty in a minute."

"Roger, please relax, please just talk to me quietly, let's be gentle and reasonable with each other. I'm very sorry I was so unpleasant to you both down in Bristol. I was upset for Priscilla, I still am, but I don't regard you as wicked, I know how these things happen."

Roger grimaced at Marigold. She beamed back. "I wanted to put you in the picture," he said. "And I want you to do something for us, if you will. First of all, here's this." He put a large gaping carrier bag onto the floor beside my feet.

I peered down and then began to dig into it. Necklaces and things. The enamel picture. The little marble, or whatever it was, statuette. Two silver cups, other oddments. "That's good of you, Priscilla will be so pleased. What about the mink?"

"I was coming to that," said Roger. "I'm afraid I sold the mink. I'd already sold it when I saw you last. I agreed with Priscilla it was a

sort of investment. I'll let her have half the proceeds. In due course."

"She mustn't worry," said Marigold. She had advanced her smartly shod blue patent-leather foot up against Roger's shoe. She kept moving her arm so that her sleeve lightly and rhythmically brushed his.

"All the jewels are there," said Roger, "and the little things from her dressing table, and Marigold has packed all the clothes and so on into three trunks. Where shall we send them?"

I wrote down the Notting Hill address.

"I didn't pack all the old cosmetics," said Marigold, "and there were a lot of old suspender belts and things--"And could you tell Priscilla we want the divorce to get going at once? Naturally I will make her an allowance."

"We won't be poorly off," said Marigold, sweeping her sleeve across Roger's. "I shall go on working after the little one is born."

"What do you do?" I asked.

"I'm a dentist."

"Good for you!" I laughed out of sheer joie de vivre. Fancy, this charming girl a dentist!

"You've told Priscilla about us, of course?" said Roger, sedate.

"Yes, yes. All shall be well and all shall be well, as Julian remarked."

"Julian?"

"Julian Baffin, the daughter of a friend of mine."

"You must go, my children," I said, rising. I could not bear any longer not being alone with my thoughts. "I will arrange everything for the best with Priscilla. It remains to wish you both every happiness."

"I confess you've surprised me," said Roger.

"Being beastly to you two won't help Priscilla."

"You've been sweet," said Marigold. I think she would have kissed me, only Roger piloted her off.

"Cheery-bye to my favourite dentist!" I shouted after them.

"He must be drunk," I heard Roger say as I shut the door.

I went back to lying face downwards on the black woolly rug.

"Guess what I've got in this bag!" I said to Priscilla.

It was the same evening. Francis had let me in. There was no sign of Christian.

Priscilla was still occupying the upstairs "new" bedroom with the rather tattered-looking walls of synthetic bamboo. The oval bed, which had black sheets, was tousled, doubtless just vacated. Priscilla, in a rather clinical white bath-robe, was sitting on a stool in front of a low very glittering dressing table. She had been staring at herself in the mirror when I came in, and returned to doing so after greeting me

without a smile. She had powdered her face rather whitely and reddened her lips. She looked grotesque, like an elderly geisha.

She did not reply. Then she suddenly reached out to a big jar of greasy cold cream and started plastering it upon her face. The red lipstick merged into the grease, tingeing it with red. Priscilla spread the pinkish mess all over her face, still gazing devouringly into her own eyes.

"Look," I said, "look who's here!" I put the white statuette onto the glass top of the dressing table. I laid the enamel picture and the malachite box beside it. I drew out a mass of entangled necklaces.

Priscilla stared. Then without touching the stuff she reached out and took a paper tissue and began wiping the red mess off her face.

"Roger brought them for you. And look, I've brought you the buffalo lady again. I'm afraid she's a bit lame, but--"And the mink stole? Did you see him?"

"It's no good. I should never have left him. It isn't fair to him. And I think away from him I'm literally going mad. All chances of happiness are gone from me. Just being with myself is hell all the time anyway. And here in this meaningless place I'm with myself more. Even hating Roger was something, it meant something, being made unhappy by him did, after all he belongs to me. And I was used to things there, there was something to do, shopping and cooking and cleaning the house, even though he didn't come home for his supper, I'd cook it and put it ready for him and he wouldn't come home and I'd sit and cry watching the television programme. Still it was all part of something, and waiting for him at night in the dark when I went to bed, listening for his key in the door, at least there was something to wait for. I wasn't alone with my mind. I don't really care if he went with girls, secretaries in the office, I suppose they all do. I don't feel now that it matters much. I'm connected with him forever, it's for better and worse, worse in this case, but any tie is something when one's drifting away to hell. You can't look after me, obviously, why should you. Christian's been very kind, but she's just curious, she's just playing a game, she'll soon get tired of me. I know I'm awful, awful, I can't think how anyone can bear to look at me. I don't want to be looked after anyway. I can feel my mind decaying already. I feel I must smell of decay. I've been in bed all day. I didn't even make up my face until just before you came, and then it looked so terrible. I hate Roger and the last year or two I've been afraid of him. But if I don't go back to him I'll just dissolve, all my inwards will come pouring out, like people who are just going to be hanged. I can't tell you what the misery's like that I'm in."

"Oh Priscilla, do stop. Here, look, pretty things. You're

pleased to see them again, so there's something that gives you pleasure." I plucked up a long necklace with blue and glassy alternate beads out of the pile and shook it free and opened it out into a big O to put round her neck, but she gestured it violently away.

"Did he send the mink?"

"Well--"

"He wants to get married--" Her mouth had become flabby and her speech blurred.

"Yes, Priscilla--"

"He's had this girl for a long time--" "Yes."

"She's pregnant--" "Yes."

"So he wants a divorce--" "Yes. Dear Priscilla, you've understood it all and you must face it all--"

"Death," she murmured, "death, death, death--" "Don't give way, my dear--" "Death."

"You'll soon feel better. You're well rid of that heel. Honestly. We'll make a new world for you, we'll spoil you, we'll all help, you'll see. You said yourself you'd go to the cinema more. Roger will give you an allowance, and Marigold is a dentist--" "And perhaps I could pass my time knitting little things for the baby!"

"That's better, show a bit of spirit!"

"Bradley, if you knew how much I hated even you, you'd know how far beyond any human hope I am now. As for Roger--I'd like to stick--a red-hot knitting needle--into his liver--" "Priscilla!"

"I read about it in a detective story. You die slowly and in terrible agony."

She had turned on her side and was sobbing quietly, rather breathlessly, her mouth shuddering, her eyes awash with tears. I had never seen anyone so inaccessible miserable. I felt an urge to put her to sleep, not for good of course, but if only one could have given her a shot of something just to stop this awful weeping, to give some intermission to the tormented consciousness.

The door opened and Christian came in. Gazing at Priscilla she greeted me inattentively with a sort of "holding" gesture which, it occurred to me, was the height of intimacy. "What is it now?" she said to Priscilla sternly.

"I've just told her about Roger and Marigold," I said.

"Oh God, did you have to?"

Priscilla suddenly started to scream quietly. "Scream quietly" may sound like an oxymoron, but I mean to indicate the curiously controlled rhythmic screaming which goes with a certain kind of hysterics. Hysterics is terrifying because of its willed and yet not willed quality. It has the frightfulness of a deliberate assault on the spectators, yet it is also, with its apparently unstoppable rhythm, like

the setting-going of a machine. It is no use asking someone in hysterics to "control themselves." By "choosing" to become hysterical they have put themselves beyond ordinary communication. Priscilla, now sitting upright in bed, gave a gasping "Uuuh!" then a screamed "Aaah!" ending in a sort of bubbling sob, then the gasp again and the scream and so on. It was an appalling sound, both tortured and cruel. I have four times heard a woman in hysterics, once my mother when my father shouted at her, once Priscilla when she was pregnant, once another woman (would that I could forget that occasion) and now Priscilla again. I turned to Christian raising my hands distractedly.

Francis Marloe came in grinning.

Christian said, "Out you go, Brad, wait downstairs."

I ran down the first flight, then went more slowly down the second flight. By the time I reached the door of the dark brown and indigo drawing-room the house had become entirely silent. I went in and stood with my feet well apart, breathing.

Christian entered.

"She's stopped," I said. "What did you do?"

"I slapped her."

I said, "I think I'm going to faint." I sat down on the sofa and covered my face with my hand.

"Brad! Quick, here, some brandy--"Could I have some biscuits or something? I haven't eaten all day. Or yesterday."

I really did feel, for that moment, faint: that odd absolutely unique sensation of a black baldacchino being lowered like an extinguisher over one's head. And now, as brandy, bread, biscuits, cheese, plumcake became available, I also knew that I was going to cry. It was many many years since I had wept. What a very strange phenomenon it is, little perhaps they realize who use it much. I recalled the dismay of the wolves when Mowgli sheds tears, in the Jungle Book. Or rather, it is Mowgli who is dismayed, and thinks he is dying. The wolves are better informed, dignified, faintly disgusted. I held the glass of brandy in both hands and stared at Christian and felt the warm water quietly rising into my eyes. The quiet inevitability of the sensation gave satisfaction. It was an achievement. Perhaps all tears are an achievement. Oh precious gift.

"Brad, dear, don't--"I hate violence," I said.

"It's no good letting her go on and on, she tires herself so, she did it for half an hour yesterday--"All right, yes, all right--"Why, you poor pet! I'm doing my best, honest. It's no fun having a near-crazy in the house. I'm doing it for you, Brad."

"Brad, what is it, you look extraordinary, something's happened to you, you're beautiful, you look like a saint or something, you look like some goddamn picture, you look all young again--"You

won't abandon Priscilla, will you, Chris?" I said, and I mopped the tears away with my hand.

"Did you just notice something, Brad?"

"What?"

"You called me 'Chris.' "

"Did I? Like old days. Well, but you won't? I'll pay you--"Oh never mind the dough. I'll look after her. I got onto a new doc. There's a treatment with injections she can have."

"Good. Julian."

"What was that?"

I had just uttered Julian's name aloud. I got up. "Chris, do you mind, I must go. I've got something very important to do." Think about Julian.

"Brad, please--Oh, all right, I won't keep you. But I want you to say something to me."

"What?"

"Oh that you forgive me or something. That there's peace between us or something. You know I just loved you, Brad. You saw my love as a sort of crushing force or a will to power or something but I just wanted to hold you. And I did really truly come back here to you and for you. I thought about you out there and what a fool I'd been. Of course I'm not a romantic crazy. I know our thing couldn't work then, we were so young and God we were stupid with each other. But there was something I saw in you which didn't leave me alone. I used to dream we were reconciled, you know in dreams at night, real dreams."

"Me too," I said.

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"Me too," I said.

"What tosh, my dearest dearest Chris."

"Oh sure, but all the same--you know something, suddenly I feel you're open to me, right open to me--I can walk straight in and there's welcome written on the mat--Brad, say those good words, will you, say you forgive me, say we're really reconciled and friends again at last."

"Of course I forgive you, Chris, of course we're reconciled. You must forgive me too, I wasn't a patient man--"Sure I do. Now thank God we can talk at last, talk all about how things were and about the bloody fools we used to be, make it all good again, buy it back, that's what 'redeem' means, doesn't it, what happens in the pawn shop. When I saw you crying for Priscilla I knew it was possible. You're a good man, Bradley Pearson, we can make it together if only we open our hearts--"Chris, dear. Please!"

"Brad, you know in a way you are my husband, I've never really stopped thinking of you that way, after all we were married in church, with my body I thee worship and the whole sacred caboodle, we were pure in heart once, we meant well by each other, we really cared, didn't we, didn't we care?"

"Possibly, but--"

"When it went wrong I thought I'd become a cynic forever--I married Evans for his money. Well, that was a real action anyway, I never left him, he died holding my hand, the poor old bugger. But now I feel as if the past has all fallen away. I came back to you to say this, Brad, to find this, and now we're older and wiser and sorry for what we did, why don't we try again?"

"Chris darling, you're dotty," I said. "But I'm very touched."

"Gee, Brad, you look so young. You look all dewy and spiritual like a cat with kittens."

"I'm going. Goodbye."

"Switzerland."

"Not Switzerland. I hate mountains."

"Well, then--"Look, I must--"Kiss me, Bradley."

A woman's face changes in tenderness. It may become scarcely recognizable. Christian en tendresse looked older, more animal-like and absurd, her features all squashed up and rubbery. She was wearing an open-necked cotton dress of rich Chinese red and a gold chain round her neck. The flesh of her neck was stained and dry behind the fresh gold of the chain. Her dyed hair was glossy and animal-sleek. She was looking at me in the cool north indigo duskiness of the room with such a humble pleading diffident rueful tender look upon her face, and her drooping hands were opened to me in a sort of Oriental gesture of abandonment and homage. I stepped forward and took her in my arms.

At the same time I laughed, and holding her, not kissing her, continued to laugh. I saw over her shoulder a quite other face of happiness. But I held her very consciously and laughed, and then she began to laugh too, her forehead moving to and fro against my shoulder.

Arnold came in.

I released Christian slowly and she looked at Arnold and went on laughing in a weary almost contented sort of way, "Oh dear, oh dear--"I'm just off," I said to Arnold.

He had sat down quietly immediately on entering, like a man in a waiting room. He had his wet look (his drenched albino aspect) as if he had been in the rain, his colourless hair darkened with grease, his face shiny, his nose pointing like a greased pin. His very pale blue eyes, washed almost to whiteness, were cool as water. I had seen, before he had time to smooth it, the expression of chagrin with which he had greeted our little scene.

"You will think it over, Brad, won't you, dear?"

"Think what over?"

"Oh he's priceless, he's forgotten it already! I just proposed to Brad and he's forgotten it!"

"I'd like to make a reappraisal. I feel I may have been unjust to you, completely wrong in fact."

"Decent of you."

"Not at all. I want to be--at peace with everybody--at this time--"Is it Christmas?" said Arnold.

"No, just--I'll read your books, Arnold--I'll do it--humbly and without prejudice--please believe that--and please forgive me for--all my--shortcomings and--"Brad's become a saint."

"Are you feeling all right, Bradley?"

"Just look at him. I guess it's the transfiguration!"

"I must go--good-bye, good-bye--and--be well--be well--" Waving rather awkwardly to them both and eluding the hand which Christian stretched out to me I got to the door and swung myself through the tiny hall and out into the street. It appeared to be evening. What had happened to the day?

As I neared the corner of the street I heard running steps behind me. It was Francis.

"Brad, I just wanted to say--Wait, please, wait--I wanted to say I'll stick by her whatever happens, I'll--"Who?"

"Priscilla."

"Oh yes. How is she?"

"Asleep."

"Thank you for helping poor Priscilla."

"Brad, I wanted to make sure you weren't angry with me."

"Why should I be?"

"Not sick with me after all the things I said and crying on you and all, some people it just sickens them if you throw up all your woes like that, and I'm afraid I--"Forget it."

"And Brad. I wanted to say, just one more thing--I just wanted to say--whatever happens--I'm on your side."

I stopped and looked at him and he smirked and bit his fat lower lip and the little eyes came questing slyly up. "In the coming--great--battle," I said, "whatever it--may turn out--to be--thank you, Francis Marloe."

He looked a little surprised. I gave a sort of military salute and walked on. He ran after me again.

"I'm very fond of you, Brad, you know that."

"Bugger off."

"Brad, please could I have some more cash--I'm sorry to bother you but Christian keeps me so short--I gave him five pounds.

T

J. he he division of one day from the next must be one of the most profound peculiarities of life on this planet. It is, on the whole, a merciful arrangement. We are not condemned to sustained flights of being, but are constantly refreshed by little holidays from ourselves. We are intermittent creatures, always falling to little ends and rising to little new beginnings. Our soon-tired consciousness is meted out in chapters, and that the world will look quite different tomorrow is, both for our comfort and our discomfort, usually true. How marvellously too night matches sleep, sweet image of it, so neatly apportioned to our need. Angels must wonder at these beings who fall so regularly out of awareness into a fantasm-infested dark. How our frail identities survive these chasms no philosopher has ever been able to explain.

The next morning--it was another sunny day--I woke early to an exact perception of my state; yet knowing too that something had changed. I was not quite as I had been the day before. I lay, testing myself, as someone after an accident might test himself for broken limbs. I certainly still felt very happy, with that curious sense of the face as waxen, dissolving into bliss, the eyes swimming with it. Desire, still cosmic, was perhaps more like physical pain, like something one could die of quite privately in a corner. But I was not dismayed. I got up and shaved and dressed with care and looked at my new face in the mirror. I looked so young it was almost uncanny. Then I drank a little tea and went to sit in the sitting-room, with my hands folded, looking through the window at the wall. I sat as still as a Buddhist and experienced myself.

I sat motionless for I am not sure how long. Perhaps I really went into some sort of trance. Then the telephone rang and my heart went off in a black explosion as I was instantly certain that it was Julian. I ran to the instrument and fumbled and dropped it twice before I got it to my ear. It was Grey-Pelham, ringing up to say that

since his wife was indisposed he had an extra ticket for Glyndebourne and would I like it? I would not! Glyndebourne forsooth! When I had politely got rid of him I rang Netting Hill. Francis answered and told me that Priscilla was calmer this morning and had agreed to see a psychiatrist. After that I sat and wondered if I would ring Ealing. Not to talk to Julian of course. Perhaps I ought to ring Rachel? But supposing Julian were to answer?

As I was scorching and freezing my mind with this possibility the phone rang again and again my heart exploded, and this time it was Rachel. Our conversation was as follows.

"Hello, Bradley. It's dreary old me."

"Rachel--dear--nice--happy--you--so glad--"You can't be drunk at this hour of the morning."

"What time is it?"

"Eleven-thirty."

"I thought it was about nine."

"You'll be glad to hear that I'm not coming round to see you."

"But I'd love you to."

"No, I've got to get hold of myself. It's so--below me--to persecute my old friends."

"We are friends, aren't we?"

"No."

"He was, I know. Never mind. Oh God, I mustn't start--"Rachel--"

"Yes?"

"How's--how's--Julian--today?"

"Oh much as usual."

"She's not--by any chance--going to come round here--to get her Hamlet--is she?"

"No. She seems to be off Hamlet today. She's down the road with a young couple who are digging a conversation pit in their garden playroom."

"A what?"

"A conversation pit."

"Oh. Ah well. I see. Tell her--No. Well--" you.

"Bradley, you do--never mind what it means--love me, don't?"

"Yes, of course."

"Sorry to be so sort of--limp and wet--Thanks for listening I'll ring again--Bye--I forgot Rachel. I decided I would go out and buy Julian a present. I still felt ill and rather faint and given to fits of trembling. At the idea of buying the present a lot of trembling came on. Present-buying is a fairly universal symptom of love. It is certainly a sine qua non. (If you don't want to give her a present you don't love her.) It is I suppose a method of touching the beloved."

The telephone rang. I staggered to it and gasped into it.

"Oh Brad. It's Chris."

"Oh--Chris--hello, dear."

"I'm glad I'm still 'Chris' today."

"Today--yes--"Have you thought over my proposition?"

"What proposition?"

"Gee, Brad, you are a tease. Look, can I come over and see you right now?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I've got a bridge party."

"But you can't play bridge."

"I learnt in the thirty or so years of your absence. I had to pass the time somehow."

"Brad, when can I see you, it's kind of urgent?"

"I'll come round to see Priscilla--this evening--probably--"O.K., I'll wait. Mind you come."

"And God bless you, Chris, God bless you, dear, God bless you."

I sat in the hall beside the telephone and fingered Julian's scarf. Since I retained it with me, although it was hers, it was as if she had given me a present. I sat and looked through the open door of the sitting-room at Julian's things arranged upon the tables. I listened to the silence of the flat in the midst of the murmur of London. Time passed. I waited. Being your slave what should I do but tend upon the hours and times of your desire. I have no precious time at all to spend, nor services to do till you require.

It now seemed to me incredible that I could have had the nerve to leave the house that morning. Suppose she had telephoned, suppose she had come, when I was away? She could not spend the whole day digging a conversation pit, whatever that was. She would surely come round soon to get her Hamlet. How good it was that I had that hostage. After a while I moved back into the sitting-room and picked up the shabby little book and sat caressing it in Hart-bourne's armchair. My eyelids drooped and the material world grew dim and I waited.

The telephone rang and I ran to it, jolting the table and knocking the six volumes of Shakespeare off onto the floor.

"Bradley. Arnold here."

"Oh God. It's you."

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Bradley, I hear--"

"What time is it?"

"Four o'clock. I hear you're coming round this evening to see Priscilla."

"Yes."

"Well, could I see you after that? There's something important I want to tell you."

"Yes. Fine. What's a conversation pit?"

"What?"

"What's a conversation pit?"

"A sunken area in a room where you put cushions and people sit and converse."

"What's the point of it?"

"It has no point."

"Oh Arnold, Arnold--'What?'"

"Nothing. I'll read your books. I'll start to like them. Everything will be different."

"Have you got softening of the brain?"

"Good-bye, goodbye--I returned to the sitting-room and I picked up the Shakespeares from the floor and I sat down in the armchair and I said to her in my heart, I will suffer, you will not. We will do each other no harm. You will cause me pain, it cannot be otherwise. But I shall cause you none. And I will feed upon my pain like one who feeds on kisses. (Oh God.) I am simply happy that you exist, happy in the absolute that is you, proud to live with you in the same city, in the same century, to see you occasionally, seldom..."

The telephone rang. I reached it. This time it was Julian.

"Oh Bradley, hello, it's me."

I made some sort of sound.

"Bradley--sorry--it's me--you know, Julian Baffin."

I said, "Hold on a minute, would you?" I covered the mouthpiece and closed my eyes tightly, groped for a chair, panting, trying to control my breath. In a few moments I said, coughing a little to disguise the tremor, "Sorry. The kettle was just boiling."

"I'm so sorry to bother you, Bradley. I promise I won't become a pest, always ringing up and coming round."

"Not at all."

"I just wondered if I could pick up my Hamlet whenever you've finished with it."

"Certainly."

"But there's no hurry at all--any time in the next fortnight would do. I'm not working on that at the moment. And there's one or two more questions I've thought of. If you like I could send them by post, and you could post me the book. I don't want to interrupt your work."

"In the next--fortnight--"Or month. I may be going to the

country actually. My school has still got the measles."

"Perhaps you could drop in some time next week," I said.

"Fine. How about Thursday morning about ten?"

"Yes. That's--fine."

"Thank you so much. I won't keep you. I know you're so busy.
Good-bye, Bradley, and thanks."

"Wait a minute," I said.

There was silence.

"Julian," I said, "are you free this evening?"

The restaurant at the top of the Post Office Tower revolves very slowly. Slow as a dial hand. Majestic trope of lion-blunting time.

How swiftly did it move that night while London crept behind the beloved head? Was it quite immobile, made still by thought, a mere fantasy of motion in a world beyond duration? Or was it spinning like a top, whirling away into invisibility, and pinning me against the outer wall, kitten-limbed and crucified by centrifugal force?

Concerning absence love has always been eloquent. The subject admits of an explicit melancholy, though doubtless there are certain pains which cannot be fully rendered. But has it ever sufficiently hymned presence? Can it do so? The presence of the loved one is perhaps always accompanied by anxiety. Mortals must tremble, where angels might enjoy. But this one grain of darkness cannot be accounted a blemish. It graces the present moment with a kind of violence which makes an ecstasy of time.

To speak more crudely, what I experienced that evening on the Post Office Tower was a kind of blinding joy. It was as if stars were exploding in front of my eyes so that I literally could not see. Breathing was fast and difficult, not unpleasant. I was conscious of a certain satisfaction in being able to go on pumping myself full of oxygen. A quiet and perhaps outwardly imperceptible shuddering possessed my whole frame. My hands vibrated, my legs ached and throbbed, my knees were in the condition described by the Greek poetess. This dereglement was completed by a sense of giddiness produced by the sheer conception of being so high above the ground and yet still connected to it. Giddiness of this kind in any case locates itself in the genitals.

All this, and further hues and saturations of bliss which I cannot describe at all, I felt on that evening as I sat with Julian in the Post Office Tower restaurant. We talked, and our communion was so perfect that it might have been telepathic for all I could make out afterwards about how it actually occurred. The evening had darkened to an intense blue, but it was not yet night. The forms of London,

some already chequered with yellow light, glided onward through a dim shimmering corpuscular haze. The Albert Hall, the Science Museums, Centre Point, the Tower of London, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Festival Hall, the Houses of Parliament, the Albert Memorial. The precious and beloved skyline of my own Jerusalem processed incessantly behind that dear mysterious head. Only the royal parks were already places of darkness, growing inkily purple with night-time and its silence.

Mysterious head. Oh the tormenting strangeness of our ignorance of other minds, the privileged comfort of the secrecy of our own! In fact on that night what I felt most in her was her lucidity, her transparency almost. That purity and unmuddied simplicity of the young, after the anxious self-guarding deviousness of later ages. Her clear eyes looked at me and she was with me and spoke to me with a directness which I had never received before. To say that there was no element of flirting is to speak with a totally inappropriate grossness. We conversed as angels might converse, not through a glass darkly but face to face. And yet: I was--again to say that I was playing a part is a barbarism. I was blazing with secrecy. As my eyes and my thoughts caressed and possessed her and as I smiled into her open attentive gaze with a passion and even with a tenderness which she could not see, I felt ready to fall to the ground fainting, perhaps dying, with the enormity of what I knew and she did not.

"Bradley, I think it's swaying."

"It can't be. I believe it does sway a little in the wind. But there's no wind tonight."

"There might be a wind up here."

"Well, there might be. Yes, I think it is swaying." How could I tell? Everything was swaying.

Of course I had merely pretended to eat. I had drunk very little wine. Alcohol still seemed a complete irrelevancy. I was drunk with love. Julian had both eaten and drunk a good deal, indiscriminately praising everything that passed her lips. We had talked about the view, about her college, about her school with the measles, about how soon one could tell whether one was a poet, about whether the novel, about why the theatre. I had never talked so easily to anyone. Oh blessed weightlessness, oh blessed space.

"Bradley, I wish I'd understood that stuff you spouted about Hamlet."

"Forget it. No high theory about Shakespeare is any good, not because he's so divine but because he's so human. Even great art is jumble in the end."

"So the critics are just stupid?"

"It needs no theory to tell us this! One should simply try to

like as much as one can."

"Like you now trying to like what my father writes?"

"That's more special. I feel I've been unjust. He has huge vitality and he tells a good story. Stories are art too, you know."

"His stuff is awfully ingenious, but it's as dead as a door nail."

"So young and so untender."

"So young, my lord, but true."

I was nearly on the floor at that moment. I also thought, in so far as thinking occurred, that she was probably right. Only I was not going to utter any harsh thing that evening. I was mainly now, since I had realized that I could not keep her with me for much longer, wondering about whether and if so how I could kiss her on parting. Kissing had never been customary between us, even when she was a child. Briefly, I had never kissed her. Never. And now tonight perhaps I would.

"Bradley, you aren't listening."

She constantly used my name. I could not use hers. She had no name.

"Ought I to read Wittgenstein?"

What I wanted to do was to kiss her in the lift going down should we chance to have that momentary love nest to ourselves. But of course that was out of the question. There must be no, absolutely no, show of marked interest. She had, as young people with their charming egoism and their impromptu modes so felicitously do, taken it quite calmly for granted that I should suddenly have felt like dining on the Post Office Tower and should, since she had happened to ring up, have happened to ask her to come too.

"No. I shouldn't bother."

"You think I wouldn't understand him?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I wouldn't?"

"Yes. He never thought of you."

"What?"

"I'm quoting again. Never mind."

"We are full of quotations tonight, aren't we. When I'm with you I feel as if the whole of English literature were inside me like a warm stew and coming out of my ears. I say, what an inelegant metaphor! Oh Bradley, what fun that we're here. Bradley, I do feel so happy!"

"Good." I asked for the bill. I did not want to ruin what was perfect by any hint of anxious hanging-on. An overstayed welcome would have been torture afterwards. I did not want to see her looking at her watch.

She looked at her watch. "Oh dear, I must go soon."

"I'll see you to the tube."

We had the lift to ourselves going down. I did not kiss her. I did not suggest that she should come back to my flat. As we walked along Goodge Street I did not touch her, even "accidentally." I was beginning to wonder how in the world it would be possible to part from her.

"Well, then--Well, then--"

"Bradley, you've been sweet, thank you, I've so much enjoyed it."

"Oh, I quite forgot to bring your Hamlet." I had of course done no such thing.

"Never mind, I'll get it another time. Good night, Bradley, and thanks."

"Yes, I--let me see--"I must run."

"Won't you--Shall we fix a time for you to come--You said you had some--I'm so often out--Or shall I--Will you--"I'll ring you. Good night, and thank you so much."

It was now or never. With a sense of moving very slowly, of executing some sort of precise figure in a minuet, I stepped a little in front of Julian, who was turning away, took her left wrist lightly in my right hand, thereby halting her, and then leaned down and pressed my judiciously parted lips against her cheek. The effect could not be casual. I straightened up and we stood for a moment looking at each other.

Julian said, "Bradley, if I asked you, would you come to Covent Garden with me?"

"Yes, of course." I would go to hell with her, and even to Covent Garden.

"It's Rosenkavalier. Next Wednesday. Meet in the foyer about half past six. I've got quite good tickets. Septimus Leech got us two, only now he can't come."

"Who is Septimus Leech?"

"Oh he's my new boy friend. Good night, Bradley."

She was gone. I stood there dazed in the lamplight among the hurrying ghosts. And I felt as a man might feel who, with a whole skin on him and a square meal inside him, sits in a cell having just been captured by the secret police.

A common though not invariable early phase of this madness, the one in fact through which I had just been passing, is a false loss of self, which can be so extreme that all fear of pain, all sense of time (time is anxiety, is fear) is utterly blotted out. The sensation itself of loving, the contemplation of the existence of the beloved, is an end in itself. A mystic's heaven on earth must be just such an endless

contemplation of God. Only God has (or would have if He existed) characteristics at least not totally inimical to the continuance of the pleasures of adoration. As the so-called "ground of being" He may be considered to have come a good deal farther than half-way. Also He is changeless. To remain thus poised in the worship of a human being is, from both sides of the relationship, a much more precarious matter, even when the beloved is not nearly forty years younger and, to say the least of it, detached.

On the second day I began to need her, though even "anxiety" would be too gross a word for that delicate silken magnetic tug, as it manifested itself at any rate initially. Self was reviving. On the first day Julian had been everywhere. On the second day she was, yes, somewhere, located vaguely, not yet dreadfully required, but needed. She was, on the second day, absent. This inspired the small craving for strategy, a little questing desire to make plans. The future, formerly blotted out by an excess of light, reappeared. There were once more vistas, hypotheses, possibilities. But joy and gratitude still lightened the world and made possible a gentle concern with other people, other things. I wonder how long a man could remain in that first phase of love? Much longer than I did, no doubt, but surely not indefinitely. The second phase, I am sure, given favouring conditions, could continue much longer. (But again, not indefinitely. Love is history, is dialectic, it must move.) As it is, I lived in hours what another man might have lived in years.

The transformation of my beatitude could, as that second day wore on, be measured by a literally physical sense of strain, as if magnetic rays or even ropes or chains were delicately plucking, then tugging, then dragging. Physical desire had of course been with me from the first, but earlier it had been, though perceptually localized, metaphysically diffused into a general glory. Sex is our great connection with the world, and at its most felicitous and spiritual it is no servitude since it informs everything and enables us to inhabit and enjoy all that we touch and look upon. At other times it settles in the body like a toad. It becomes a drag, a weight: not necessarily for this reason unwelcome. We may love our chains and our stripes too. By the time Julian telephoned I was in deep anxiety and yearning but not in hell. I could not then willingly have put off seeing her, the craving was too acute. But I was able, when I was with her, to be perfectly happy. I did not expect the inferno.

I woke with a clear head, a slight headache, and the knowledge that I was completely done for. Reason which had been--where had it been, during the last days?--somehow absent or dazed or altered or in abeyance, was once more at its post. (At least it was audible.) But in a rather specialized role and certainly not in that of a

consoling friend. Reason was not, needless to say, uttering any coarse observations, such as that Julian was after all a very ordinary young woman and not worth all this fuss. Nor was it even pointing out that I had put myself in a situation where the torments of jealousy were simply endemic. I had not yet got as far as jealousy. That too was still to come. What the cold light showed me was that my situation was simply unlivable. I wanted, with a desire greater than any desire which I had ever conceived could exist without instantly killing its owner by spontaneous combustion, something which I simply could not have.

There were no tears now. I lay in bed in an electric storm of physical desire. I tossed and panted and groaned as if I were wrestling with a palpable demon. The fact that I had actually touched her, kissed her, grew (I am sorry about these metaphors) into a sort of mountain which kept falling on top of me. I felt her flesh upon my lips. Phantoms were bred from this touch. I felt like a grotesque condemned excluded monster. How could it be that I had actually kissed her cheek without enveloping her, without becoming her? How could I at that moment have refrained from kneeling at her feet and howling?

I got up but was suffering such extreme local discomfort that I could hardly get dressed. I started making tea, but its smell sickened me. I drank a little whisky in a glass of water and began to feel very ill. I could not stand still but wandered distractedly and rapidly about the flat, rubbing against the furniture as a tiger in a cage endlessly brushes its bars. I had ceased groaning and was now hissing. I tried to compose a few thoughts about the future. Should I kill myself? Should I go at once to Patara and barricade myself in and blow my mind with alcohol? Run, run, run. But I could not compose thoughts. All that concerned me was finding some way of getting through these present minutes of pain.

Jealousy is the most dreadfully involuntary of all sins. It is at once one of the ugliest and one of the most pardonable. In fact, in relation to its badness it is probably the most pardonable. Zeus, who smiles a lovers' oaths, must also condone their pangs and the venom which these pangs engender. Some Frenchman said that jealousy was born with love, but did not always die with love. I am not sure whether this is true. I would think that where there is jealousy there is love, and its appearance when love has apparently ceased is always a proof that the cessation is apparent. (I believe this is not just a verbal point.) Jealousy is certainly a measure of love in some, though as my own case illustrates not in all, of its phases. It also (and this may have prompted the Frenchman's idea) seems like an alien growth--and growth is indeed the word. Jealousy is a cancer, it can kill that which

it feeds on, though it is usually a horribly slow killer. (And thereby dies itself.) Also of course, to change the metaphor, jealousy is love, it is loving consciousness, loving vision, darkened by pain and in its most awful forms distorted by hate.

The idea that one recovers from being in love is, of course, by definition (by my definition anyway) excluded from the state of love. Besides, one does not always recover. And certainly no such banal would-be comfort could have existed for a second in the scorching atmosphere of my mind at that time. As I said earlier, I knew that I was completely done for. There was no ray of light, no comfort at all. Though I will now also mention something which dawned upon me later. There was of course no question now of writing, of "sublimating" it all (ridiculous expression). But the sense remained that this was my destiny, that this was... the work of... the same power. And to be pinned down by that power, even liver, was to be in some terrible sense in one's own place.

To speak of matters which are less obscure, I soon of course decided that I could not "run." I could not go away to the country. I had to see Julian again, I had to wait through those awful days until the appointment at Covent Garden. Of course I wanted to ring her up at once and ask her to see me. But I somehow kept blindly thrusting this temptation away. I would not let my life degenerate into madness. Better to be alone with him and to suffer than to pull it all down into some sort of yelling chaos. Silence, though now with a different and utterly unconsoling sense, was my only task.

Somewhere in the middle of that morning, which I will not attempt to describe further (except to say that Hartbourne rang up: I replaced the receiver at once) Francis Marloe came.

I went back into the sitting-room and he followed me, already staring at me with surprise. I sat down and started rubbing my eyes and my brow, breathing heavily.

"What's the matter, Brad?"

"Nothing."

"I say, there's some whisky. I didn't know you had any. You must have hidden it jolly well. May I have some?"

"Yes."

"Would you like some?"

"Yes."

Francis was putting a glass into my hand. "Are you ill?"

"Yes."

"What's the matter?"

I drank some whisky and choked a bit. I felt extremely sick and also unable to distinguish physical from mental pain.

"Brad, we waited all evening for you."

"Why? Where?"

"You said you'd come to see Priscilla."

"Oh. Priscilla. Yes." I had totally and absolutely forgotten Priscilla's existence.

"We rang up here."

"I was out to dinner."

"Had you just forgotten?"

"Yes."

"Arnold was there till after eleven. He wanted to see you about something. He was in a bit of a state."

"How ^{as} Priscilla?"

"Much the same. Chris wants to know if you'd mind if she had de^{^1}treatment."

"You mean you don't mind? You know it destroys cells in the brain?"

"Then she'd better not have it."

"On the other hand--"

"I ought to see Priscilla," I said, I think, aloud. But I knew that I just couldn't. I had not got a grain of spirit to offer to any other person. I could not expose myself in my present condition to that poor rapacious craving consciousness.

"Priscilla said she'd do anything you wanted."

Electric shocks. They batter the brain cage. Like hitting the wireless, they say, to make it go. I must pull myself together. Priscilla.

"We must go--into it--" I said.

"Brad, what's the matter?"

"Nothing. Destruction of cells in the brain."

"Are you ill?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"I'm in love."

"Oh," said Francis. "Who with?"

"Julian Baffin."

I had not intended to tell him. It was something to do with Priscilla that I did. The pity of it. And then a sense of being battered beyond caring.

Francis took it coolly. I suppose that was the way to take it. "Oh. Is it very bad, I mean your sickness?"

"Yes."

"Have you told her?"

"Don't be a fool," I said. "I'm fifty-eight. She's twenty."

"I don't see that that decides anything much," said Francis. "Love is no respecter of ages, everyone knows that. Can I have some more whisky?"

"You don't understand," I said. "I can't--before that--young girl--make a display of feelings such as I--feel. It would appal her. And as I can envisage--no possible relationship with her of that kind--"

"I don't see why not," said Francis, "though whether it would be a good idea is another matter."

"Don't talk such utter--It's a question of morals and of--everything. She cannot possibly feel--for me--almost an old man--it would just disgust her--she simply wouldn't want to see me again."

"There's a lot of assumptions there. As for morals, well maybe, though I don't know. Everything is another matter, especially these days. But will you enjoy going on and on meeting her and keeping your mouth shut?"

"No, of course not."

"Well, then. Sorry to be so simple-minded. Hadn't you better start pulling out?"

"You've obviously never been in love."

"I have actually. And awfully. And--always--without hope--I've never had my love reciprocated ever. You can't tell me--"I can't pull out. I'm only just in. I don't know what to do. I feel I'm going mad, I'm trapped."

"Cut and run. Go to Spain or something."

"I can't. I'm seeing her on Wednesday. We're going to the opera. Oh Christ."

"It would sicken her."

"You could do it with a sort of light touch--"There's a dignity and a power in silence."

"Silence?" said Francis. "You've broken that already."

O my prophetic soul. It was true.

"Of course I won't tell anybody," said Francis. "But why after all did you tell me? You didn't intend to and you'll regret it. You'll probably hate me for it. But please, please don't if you can. You told me because you were frantic, because you felt an irresistible nervous urge. You'll tell her, sooner or later, for the same reason."

"Never."

"There's no need to make such heavy weather of it. As for her being sickened, it's far more likely that she'll laugh."

"Laugh?"

"Young people can't take too seriously the feelings of oldies like us. She'll be rather touched, but she'll regard it as an absurd infatuation. She'll be amused, fascinated. It'll make her day."

"Oh get out," I said, "get out."

"Brad, you are cross with me, don't be, it wasn't my fault you told me."

"Get out."

"Brad, what about Priscilla?"

"Do anything you think fit. I leave it to you."

"Aren't you coming over to see her?"

"Yes, yes. Later. Give her my love."

Francis got as far as the door. I was still sitting and rubbing my eyes. Francis's funny bear face was all creased up with anxiety and concern and he suddenly resembled his sister, when she had become so absurd, looking at me tenderly in the indigo dark of our old drawing-room.

"Brad, why don't you make a thing of Priscilla?"

"What do you mean?"

"Make her your life-line. Go all out to help her. Really make a job of it. Take your mind off this."

"You don't know what this is like."

"Why shouldn't you have an affair with Julian Baffin? It wouldn't do her any harm."

"You vile--thing--Oh why did I tell you, why did I tell you, I must have been insane--"Well, I'll keep mum. All right, all right, I'm going."

When he was gone I simply ran berserk round the house. Why oh why oh why had I broken my silence. I had given away my only treasure and I had given it to a fool. Not that I was concerned about whether Francis would betray me. Some much more frightening thing had been added to my pain. In my chess game with the dark lord I had made perhaps a fatally wrong move.

Later on I sat down and began to think over what Francis had said to me. At least I thought over some of it. About Priscilla I did not think at all.

My dear Bradley,

I have lately got myself into the most terrible mess and I feel that I must lay the whole matter before you. Perhaps it won't surprise you all that much. I have fallen desperately in love with Christian. I can imagine your dry irony at this announcement. "Falling in love? At your age? Really!" I know how much you despise what is "romantic." This has been, hasn't it, one of our old disagreements. Let me assure you that what I feel now has nothing to do with rosy dreaming or "the soppy." I have never been in a grimmer mood in my life, nor I think in a more horribly realistic one. Bradley, this is the real thing, I'm afraid. I am completely floored by a force in which, I suspect, you simply do not believe! How can I convince you that I am in extremist I hoped to see you on several occasions lately to try to explain, to show you, but perhaps a letter is better. Anyway, that's point one. I am really in love

and it's a terrible experience. I don't think I've ever felt quite like this before. I'm turned inside out, I'm living in a sort of myth, I've been depersonalized and made into somebody else. I feel sure, by the way, that I've been completely transformed as a writer. These things connect, they must do. I shall write much better harder stuff in future, as a result of this, whatever happens. God, I feel hard, hard, hard. I don't know if you can understand.

The third point is about you. How do you come in? Well, you just are absolutely in. I wish you weren't, but you can in fact be useful. Excuse this cold directness. Perhaps now you can see what I mean by "hard,"

About Christian, there is a problem too which concerns you. I have not yet said, though of course I have implied, how she feels. Well, she loves me. A lot has happened in the last few days. They have been probably the most eventful days of my whole life. What Christian was saying to you the last time you saw her was of course a sort of joke, a mere result of high spirits, as I imagine you realized. She is such a gay affectionate person. However she is not indifferent to you and she wants something from you now which is rather hard to name: a sort of ratification of the arrangement I have been describing, a sort of final reconciliation and settling of old scores and also the assurance, which I'm sure you can give, that you will still be her friend when she is living with me. I might add that Christian, who is a very scrupulous person, is extremely concerned about Rachel's rights and whether Rachel will be able to "manage." I hope that here too you can give some reassurance. Rachel is strong too. They are really two marvellous women. Bradley, do you follow all this? I feel such a mixture of joy and fear and sheer hard will, I'm not sure if I'm expressing myself clearly.

I shall deliver this by hand and will not try to see you at once. But soon, I mean later today or tomorrow, I would like to talk to you. You will be coming to see Priscilla of course, and we could meet then. There is no need to delay your talk with Rachel till you've seen me. The sooner that happens the better. But I'd like to see you before you see Chris alone. God, does this make sense? It is an appeal, and that should tickle your vanity. You are in a strong position for once. Please help me. I ask in the name of our friendship.

Arnold

PS. If you hate all this for God's sake be at least kind and don't give me any sort of hell about it. I may sound rational but I'm feeling terribly crazy and upset. I so much don't want to hurt Rachel. And please don't rush round to Chris and upset her, just when some

things have become clear. And don't see Rachel either unless you can do it quietly and like I asked. Sorry, sorry.

I will not attempt to describe how I got through the next few days. There are desolations of the spirit which can only be hinted at. I sat there huge-eyed in the wreck of myself. At the same time there was an awful crescendo of excitement as Wednesday approached, and the idea of simply being with her began to shed a lurid joy, a demonic version of the joy which I had felt upon the Post Office Tower. Then I had been in innocence. Now I felt both guilty and doomed. And, in a way that concerned myself alone, savage, extreme, rude, cruel... Yet: to be with her again. Wednesday.

Of course I had to answer the telephone in case it was her. Every time it sounded was like a severe electric shock. Christian rang, Arnold rang. I put the receiver down at once. Let them make what they like of it. Arnold and Francis both came and rang the bell, but I could see them through the frosted glass of the door and did not let them in. I did not know if they could see me, I was indifferent to that. Francis dropped a note in to say that Priscilla was having shock treatment and seemed better. Rachel called, but I hid. Later she telephoned in some state of emotion. I spoke briefly and said I would ring her later. Thus I beguiled the time. I also started several letters to Julian. My dear Julian, I have lately got myself into the most terrible mess and I feel that I must lay the whole matter before you. Dear Julian, I am sorry that I must leave London and cannot join you on Wednesday. Dearest Julian, I love you, I am in anguish, oh my darling. Of course I tore up all these letters, they were just for private self-expression. At last, after centuries of sick emotion, Wednesday came.

How I feel about music is another thing. I am not actually tone deaf, though it might be better if I were. Music can touch me, it can get at me, it can torment. It just, as it were, reaches me, like a sinister gabbling in a language one can almost understand, a gabbling which is horribly, one suspects, about oneself. When I was younger I had even listened to music deliberately, stunning myself with disorderly emotion and imagining that I was having a great experience. True pleasure in art is a cold fire. I do not wish to deny that there are some people--though fewer than one might think from the talk of our self-styled experts--who derive a pure and mathematically clarified pleasure from these medleys of sound. All I can say is that "music" for me was simply an occasion for personal fantasy, the outrush of hot muddled emotions, the muck of my mind made audible.

The softly cacophonous red and gold scene swung in my

vision, beginning to swirl gently like something out of Blake: it was a huge coloured ball, a sort of immense Christmas decoration, a glittering shining twittering globe of dim rosy light in the midst of which Julian and I were suspended, rotating, held together by a swooning intensity of precarious feather-touch. Somewhere above us a bright blue heaven blazed with stars and round about us half-naked women lifted ruddy torches up. My arm was on fire, my foot was on fire, my knee was trembling with the effort of keeping still. I was in a golden scarlet jungle full of the chattering of apes and the whistling of birds. A scimitar of sweet sounds sliced the air and entered into the red scar and became pain. I was that sword of agony, I was that pain. I was in an arena, surrounded by thousands of grimacing nodding faces, where I had been condemned to death by pure sound. I was to be killed by the whistling of birds and buried in a pit of velvet. I was to be gilded and then flayed.

"Bradley, what's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"You weren't listening."

"Were you talking?"

"I was asking you if you knew the story."

"What story?"

"Of Rosenkavalier."

"Of course I don't know the story of Rosenkavalier."

"Well, quick, you'd better read your programme--"No, you tell me."

"Oh well, it's quite simple really, it's about this young man, Octavian, and the Marschallin loves him, and they're lovers, only she's much older than he is and she's afraid she'll lose him because he's bound to fall in love with somebody his own age--"How old is he and how old is she?"

"Oh, I suppose he's about twenty and she's about thirty."

"Thirty?"

"Enough."

"Don't you want to know what happens next?"

"No."

At that moment there was a pattering noise of clapping, rising to a rattling crescendo, the deadly sound of a dry sea, the light banging of many bones in a tempest.

The stars faded and the red torches began to dim and a terrifying packed silence slowly fell as the conductor lifted up his rod. Silence. Darkness. Then a rush of wind and a flurry of sweet pulsating anguish has been set free to stream through the dark. I closed my eyes and bowed my head before it. Could I transform all this extraneous sweetness into a river of pure love? Or would I be somehow undone

by it, choked, dismembered, disgraced? I felt now almost at once a pang of relief as, after the first few moments, tears began to flow freely out of my eyes. The gift of tears which had been given and then withdrawn again had come back to bless me. I wept with a marvellous facility, quietly relaxing my arm and my leg. Perhaps if I wept copiously throughout I could bear it after all. I was not listening to the music, I was undergoing it, and the full yearning of my heart was flowing automatically out of my eyes and soaking my waistcoat, as I hung, so easily now, together with Julian, fluttering, hovering like a double hawk, like a double angel, in the dark void pierced by sorties of fire. I only wondered if it would soon prove impossible to cry quietly, and whether I should then begin to sob.

The curtain suddenly fled away to reveal an enormous double bed surrounded by a cavern of looped-up blood-red hangings. This consoled me for a moment because it reminded me of Carpaccio's "Dream of Saint Ursula." I even murmured "Carpaccio" to myself as a protective charm. But these cooling comparisons were soon put to flight and even Carpaccio could not rescue me from what happened next. Not on the bed but upon some cushions near the front of the stage two girls were lying in a close embrace. (At least I suppose one of them was enacting a young man.) Then they began to sing.

I became aware that I had uttered a sort of moan, because the man on my other side, whom I noticed now for the first time, turned and stared at me. At the same moment my stomach seemed to come sliding down from somewhere else and then quickly arched itself up again and I felt a quick bitter taste in my mouth. I murmured "Sorry!" quickly in Julian's direction and got up. There was a soft awkward scraping at the end of the row as six people rose hastily to let me out. I blundered by, slipped on some steps, the terrible relentless sweet sound still gripping my shoulders with its talons. Then I was pushing my way underneath the illuminated sign marked exit and out into the brightly lit and completely empty and suddenly silent foyer. I walked fast. I was definitely going to be sick.

Selection of a place to be sick in is always a matter of personal importance and can add an extra tormenting dimension to the graceless horror of vomiting. Not on the carpet, not on the table, not over your hostess's dress. I did not want to be sick within the precincts of the Royal Opera House, nor was I. I emerged into a deserted shabby street and a pungent spicy smell of early dusk. The pillars of the Opera House, blazing a pale gold behind me, seemed in that squalid place like the portico of a ruined or perhaps imagined or perhaps magically fabricated palace, the green and white arcades of the foreign fruit market, looking like something out of the Italian Renaissance, actually clinging to its side. I turned a corner and

confronted an array of about a thousand peaches in tiers of boxes behind a lattice grille. I carefully took hold of the grille with one hand and leaned well forward and was sick.

I leaned there for a moment, looking down at what I had done, and aware too of the tear-wetness of my face upon which a faint breeze was coolly blowing. I remembered that casket of agony, steel coated in sugar. The inevitable loss of the beloved. And I experienced Julian. I cannot explain this. I simply felt in a sort of exhausted defeated cornered utmost way that she was. There was no particular joy or relief in this, but a sort of absolute categorical quality of grasp of her being.

I became aware that someone was standing beside me. Julian said, "How are you feeling now, Bradley?"

I began to walk away from her, fumbling for my handkerchief. I wiped my mouth carefully, trying to cleanse it within with saliva.

I was walking along a corridor composed entirely of cages. I was in a prison, I was in a concentration camp. There was a wall composed of transparent sacks full of fiery carrots. They looked at me like derisive faces, like monkeys' bottoms. I breathed carefully and regularly and interrogated my stomach, stroking it gently with my hands. I turned into a lighted arcade and tested my stomach against a smell of decaying lettuce. I walked onward occupied in breathing. Only now I felt so empty and so faint. I felt that I had reached the end of the world, I felt like a stag when it can run no farther and turns and bows its head to the hounds, I felt like Actaeon condemned and cornered and devoured.

Julian was following me. I could hear the soft tap-tap of her shoes on the sticky pavement and my whole body apprehended her presence behind me.

"Bradley, would you like some coffee? There's a stall there."

"No."

"Let's sit down somewhere."

"Nowhere to sit."

We passed between two lorries loaded with milky-white boxes of dark cherries and came out into the open. It was becoming dark, lights had come on revealing the sturdy elegant military outline of the vegetable market, resembling a magazine, a seedy eighteenth-century barracks, though quiet at this time and sombre as a cloister.

Opposite to us the big derelict eastern portico of Inigo Jones's church was now in view, cluttered up with barrows and housing at the far end the coffee stall referred to by Julian. Some mean and casual lamplight, itself seeming dirty, revealed the thick pillars, a few lounging market men, a large pile of vegetable refuse and disinte-

rating cardboard boxes. It was like a scene in some small battered Italian city, rendered by Hogarth.

Julian seated herself on the plinth of one of the pillars at the lark end of the portico, and I sat down next to her, or as near next to her as the bulge of the column would allow. I could feel the thick filth and muck of London under my feet, under my bottom, behind my back. I saw, in a diagonal of dim light, Julian's silk dress hitched up, her tights, smoky blue, coloured by the flesh within, her shoes, also blue, against which I had so cautiously placed my own.

"Poor Bradley," said Julian.

"I'm sorry."

"Was it the music?"

"No, it was you. Sorry."

We were silent then for what seemed ages. I sighed and leaned back against the pillar and felt a few more tears, late-comers to the scene, quiet and gentle, come slowly brimming up and overflowing. I contemplated Julian's blue shoes.

Then Julian said, "How me?"

"I'm terribly in love with you. But please don't worry about it."

Julian whistled. No, this does not quite convey the sound she made. She let her breath out thoughtfully, judiciously.

After a while she said, "I thought perhaps you were."

"How on earth did you know?" I said, and I rubbed my face and dabbed my lips with my wet hand.

"The way you kissed me last week."

"Oh really. Well, I'm sorry. Now I think I'd better go home. I'll be leaving London tomorrow. I'm very sorry to have spoilt your evening. I hope you'll excuse my animal behaviour. I hope you haven't dirtied your pretty dress. Good night." I actually got up. I felt quite empty and light, able to walk. First the flesh, then the spirit. I started to walk away in the direction of Henrietta Street.

Julian was in front of me. I saw her face, the bird-mask fox-mask very intense and clear. "Bradley, don't go. Come and sit down again, just for a moment." She put her hand on my arm.

"Come back. Please."

I came back. I sat down again and covered my face. Then I felt Julian's hand trying to come through the crook of my arm. I shook her off again. I felt determined and violent, as if at that moment I hated her and could kill her.

"Bradley, don't--be like that--Please talk to me."

"Don't try to touch me," I said.

"All right, I won't. But please talk."

"There's nothing to talk about. I have done what I swore to

myself I would never do, told you about my condition. I don't have to emphasize, I think you must already have gathered, that this is all rather extreme. I shall tomorrow do what I should have done earlier, go away. What I do not propose to do is to gratify your girlish vanity by a display of my feelings."

"Bradley, listen, listen. I'm not good at explaining or arguing but - You see, you can't just unload all this onto me and then run off. It isn't fair. You must see that."

"I'm beyond fairness," I said. "I just want to survive. I'm sure you feel a curiosity which it is natural to try to gratify. Even perhaps politeness suggests that one should be a little less abrupt. But I honestly don't care a hang about considering your feelings and all that. It's possibly the worst thing I've ever done. But now it's done there's little point in lingering over a post-mortem, however much satisfaction you might derive from it."

"Don't you want to talk to me about your love?"

The question had a striking simplicity. I was clear about the answer. "No. It's all spoilt. I endlessly imagined talking to you about it, but that just belonged to the fantasy world. I can't talk love to you in the real world. The real world rejects it. It's not that it would be a crime so much as--absurd. I feel quite cold and--dry. What do you want? To hear me praise your eyes?"

"Has telling your love--made your love--end?"

"No. But it's--it's not--it has no speech any more--it's just something I've got to carry away and live with. When I hadn't told you I could endlessly imagine myself telling you. Now--the tongue has been cut out."

"I--Bradley, don't go--I must--oh help me--find the right words--This is important--And it concerns me--You talk as if there was nobody here but you."

"There is nobody here but me," I said. "You're just something in my dream."

"That's not true. I'm real. I hear your words. I can suffer."

"Suffer? You?" I got up with a sort of laugh and set off again. This time before I could take more than a step or two Julian, still sitting down, had managed to capture one of my hands in two of hers. I looked down into her face. I willed to pull my hand from her, but somewhere between the brain and the hand the message got lost. I stood looking down into her urgent face which seemed to have hardened and aged. She gazed at me, not tenderly but frowning with intent, the eyes narrowed into thin questioning rectangles, the lips parted, the nose wrinkled with some sort of delicate fastidious doubt. She said, "Sit down, please." I sat down, and she released my hand.

We looked at each other. "Bradley, you can't go."

"It looks like it. Do you know, you are a very cruel young lady."

"This isn't cruelty. There's something I've got to understand. You say you're just concerned with yourself. All right. I'm just concerned with myself. And you did start it. You can't just stop it now when you decide to. I'm an equal partner in this game."

"I hope you are enjoying the game. It must be pleasant to feel blood on your claws. It'll give you something nice to think about when you lie in bed tonight."

"Don't be beastly to me, Bradley, it isn't my fault. I didn't invite you to fall in love with me. I never dreamt of it at all. When did it happen? When did you first begin to notice me in that way?"

"All right, I dare say I can trust your discretion. But I must now ask you to release me from this unkind and unseemly inquisition."

Julian said, after another short pause, "So you're going away tomorrow? Where to?"

"Abroad."

"And what am I supposed to do? Just lock this evening away and forget about it?"

"Yes."

"You think that's possible?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean."

"I see. And how long will it take you to get over this, as you put it, unfortunate infatuation?"

"I did not use the word 'infatuation.' "

"Suppose I say you just want to go to bed with me?"

"Suppose you say it."

"You mean you don't care what I think?"

"Not now."

"Because you've spoilt all the fantasy fun of your love by bringing it out into the real world?"

I got up and got well away from her this time, walking quickly. I saw her as in a vision, her red-and-blue silk tulip dress spread by her legs, striding like a Spartan maid, her shining blue feet twinkling, her arms held out. And now again she had cut me off and we had stopped beside a lorry loaded with white boxes. A unique but unidentified smell, carrying awful associations, entered my mind like a swarm of bees. I leaned against the tail board of the lorry and groaned.

"Bradley, may I touch you?"

"No. Please go away. If you pity me at all, go away."

"Bradley, you've upset me and you must let me talk this out, I want to understand myself too, you don't conceive--"I know this must

nauseate you."

"You say you aren't thinking about me. Indeed you aren't!"

"What's that bloody smell? What's in those boxes?"

"Strawberries."

"Strawberries!" The smell of youthful illusion and feverish transient joy.

"You say you love me, but you aren't interested in me in the least."

"Nope. Now good-bye. Please."

"You evidently don't think at all that I might return your affection."

"Nope. What?"

"That I might return your affection."

"Don't be silly," I said. "You're being childish." Pigeons, unsure whether it was day or night, were walking about near our feet. I looked at the pigeons.

"Your love must be very--what's the word--solipsistic if you don't even imagine or speculate about what I might feel."

"Yes," I said, "it is solipsistic. It's got to be. It's a game I play by myself."

"Then you oughtn't to have told me about it."

"We agree on that."

"But don't you want to know what I feel?"

"I'm not going to get excited about what you feel," I said. "You're a very silly young girl. You're flattered and thrilled because an older man is making a fool of himself about you. Possibly this is the first time this has happened to you, and doubtless it won't be the last. Of course you want to explore the situation a bit, probe your feelings, fake up a few emotions. That's no use to me. And of course I realize that you'd have to be a good deal older and tougher and cooler than you are to be able to drop this thing at once as you ought to do. So you can't do what you ought to do any more than I can. What a pity. Now let's get away from these blasted strawberries. I'm going home."

"Bradley, how old are you?"

The question took me horribly by surprise, but I replied instantly, "Forty-six."

Why I told this lie is hard to explain. Partly it was just a bitter joke. I was so absorbed in prophetic calculation of this evening's damage, of how much more awful the pains of loss and jealousy and despair would now be; to be asked my age was somehow the last straw, the last dash of salt upon the wound. One could only jest. Anyway surely the girl knew my age. Also however in another part of my mind was the idea: I am not "really" fifty-eight, how can I be. I feel young, I look young. There was an immediate instinct for

concealment. I was in fact about to say forty-eight, and then hopped onto forty-six. That seemed a reasonable age, acceptable, right.

Julian was silent for a moment. She seemed surprised. We turned into Bedford Street. Then she said, "Oh, then you are a little older than my father. I thought you were younger."

I began to laugh helplessly, wailing softly to myself, how funny it was, how exquisitely insane. Of course young people do not reckon ages, do not perceive temporal distance. Over thirty it all looks much the same to them. And I had this deceptively youthful mask. Oh funny funny funny.

"Bradley, don't laugh in that horrible way, what is it? Please let us stop and talk, I must talk to you properly tonight."

"All right, let us stop and talk."

"What's this place?"

"Inigo Jones giving us another chance."

"No one has ever been sick for me before," said Julian.

"Don't flatter yourself. It was partly Strauss."

"Good old Strauss."

I was sitting Egyptian style, square, with my hands on my knees, looking away into the darkness where the shadow-cat had made himself a play-fellow out of the stuff of the night. A warm hand came questing lightly over my tensed knuckles. "Don't, Julian. I really am going in a minute. Please try to make it easy."

She withdrew her hand. "Bradley, don't be so cold to me."

"I may behave like a fool, but that's no reason for you to behave like a bloody bitch."

"To a nunnery go and quickly too. Farewell."

"I know this amuses you immensely. But please stop, be silent, don't touch."

"I won't be silent and I will touch." She put her tormenting hand upon my arm again.

I said, "You are behaving--so badly--I wouldn't have--believed--you could be so--frivolously--unkind."

I turned round to face her, taking the offending hand in a strong grip just above the wrist. There was a shock wave as I apprehended rather than saw her excited half-smiling face. Then I put my arms very evenly and strongly around her shoulders and kissed her with very great care upon the mouth.

There are moments of paradise which are worth millennia of hell, or so one may think, only one is not always fully conscious of this at the moment in question. I was fully conscious. I knew that even if the ruin of the world were to ensue I had made a good bargain. I had imagined kissing Julian, but I had not prefigured this concentrated intensity of pure joy, this sudden white-hot rapturous

pressure of lips upon lips, being upon being.

I was so utterly transported by the quite unexpected experience of holding and kissing her that it was only, I think, in some secondary moment inside this moment that I became aware that she was also holding and kissing me. Both her arms were round my neck and her lips were ardent and her eyes were closed.

I turned my head and began to push her away and she withdrew her arms from my neck. I was aided in releasing her by the innate awkwardness of seated kissing. We drew apart.

"Don't talk lying rubbish."

"What am I to do? You won't listen properly. You think I'm a child, you think I'm playing, it's not so. Of course I'm confused. I've known you such a long time, all my life. I've always loved you. Please don't interrupt. Oh if you only knew how much I always looked forward to your coming, wanted to talk to you, wanted to tell you things. You never noticed, but lots and lots of things weren't real to me at all until I'd told you about them. If you only knew how much I've always admired you. When I was a child I used to say I wanted to marry you. Do you remember? I'm sure you don't. You've been my ideal man for ever and ever. And this isn't just a silly child's thing, it isn't even a sort of crush, it's a deep real love. Of course it's a love I've not questioned or thought about or even named until quite lately--but I have questioned it and thought about it--as soon as I felt and knew that I was grown up. You see, my love has grown up too. I've so much wanted to be with you, I've so much wanted to get to know you properly, since I've been a woman. Why do you think I made all that fuss about discussing the play? I did want to discuss the play. But I much more wanted and needed your affection and your attention. God, I wanted just to look at you. You can't think how I've longed to touch you and kiss you sometimes in these last, oh years, only I didn't dare to and thought I never would. And lately, oh ever since that day you saw me tearing up the letters, I've been thinking about you almost all the time--and so especially since last week when I--when I had a sort of premonition about--what you told me tonight--I've thought about nothing else but you."

"What about Septimus?" I said.

"Who?"

"Septimus. Septimus Leech. Your boy friend. Haven't you been able to spare a couple of minutes to think about him?"

"Oh that. I just said that. I think I may even have said it out of some sort of instinct to tease you. He isn't my boy friend, he's just a friend. I haven't got a boy friend."

I said, "I see." I got up lightly and quickly and made for the gateway. I turned along Bedford Street in the direction of Leicester

Square station. As I crossed into Garrick Street, Julian, walking beside me, thrust her left hand into my right hand. With my left hand I carefully detached hers and dropped it again by her side. We walked on in silence as far as the corner of St. Martin's Lane.

Then Julian said, "I see that you're determined not to believe or attend to anything that I say. You seem to think that I'm still about twelve."

"No, no," I said. "I attended carefully to your statement and found it interesting, even touching. And remarkably well expressed considering you invented it on the spur of the moment. It was not however very detailed or very clear, nor do I yet see what implications it has if any."

"God, Bradley, I do love you."

"That's very kind of you."

"I'm not inventing it, it's true."

"I am not accusing you of insincerity. Just of not having the faintest idea what you are talking about. You admitted to being confused."

"Did I?"

"The main source of your confusion is fairly obvious. You have liked me, or, as you are gracious enough to say, loved me, when you were a little ignorant innocent child and I was an impressive visitor, a writer, a friend of your father's and so on. Now you are an adult and I am a man, a good deal your senior, but suddenly seen as inhabiting the same adult world. Even leaving aside the little shocks which you have had this evening, you are naturally surprised, possibly a bit elated, to find that we are now somehow equals. What in this new situation do you do with your old feeling of affection for the man whom the child used to admire? Is this question important? In itself probably not. My inexcusable proceedings have made it so, just for the moment at any rate. Startled, amused and thrilled by my idiotic declaration, you have felt impelled to make a counter-statement which is totally muddled and unclear and which you will certainly regret tomorrow. That's all. Here we are at the station, thank God."

"Was that kiss I gave you muddled and unclear?" said Julian.

"You're going home by train," I said. "I'll say good night now."

"Bradley, have you taken in what I said?"

"You don't know what you said. Tomorrow it will seem a bad dream."

"We'll see about that! At least you've talked to me, you've argued."

"There's nothing to talk about. I've just been irresponsibly prolonging the pleasure of being with you."

"Look, I don't have to go now."

"Yes, you do. It's finished."

"It isn't. You won't leave London, will you, please?"

"I won't--leave London," I said.

"You'll see me tomorrow?"

"Maybe."

"I'll ring up about ten."

"Good night."

Without putting my hands on her I leaned down and brushed her lips very lightly with mine. Then I turned at once and went back up the steps into Charing Cross Road. I walked along blindly, grimacing with joy.

I slept, I suppose. I kept being nudged awake by a sort of bliss and then sinking again. My body ached with a painful delightful sensation of desire and gratified desire, somehow merged into a single mode of being. I groaned softly over myself. I was made of something else, something delicious, in which consciousness throbbed in a warm daze. I was made of honey and fudge and marzipan, and at the same time I was made of steel. I was a steel wire vibrating quietly in the midst of blue emptiness. These words do not of course convey my sensations, no words could. I did not think. I was. In so far as any stray thoughts attempted to intrude into this heaven I sent them packing.

I rose early and shaved with majestic slowness and dressed with indulgent care and spent a long time inspecting myself in the mirror. I looked about thirty-five. Well, forty. My recent regime had made me even thinner and this suited me. Faded silky grey-blond hair, straight and quite a lot of it, a large-nostrilled bony nose, not unsightly, granity blue-grey eyes, good cheekbones, a large brow, a thin mouth: an intellectual's face. The face, too, of a puritan. What of him?

I drank some water. Eating was, of course, once more out of the question. I felt sick and shuddery but the night had been heaven and the glory of it had not yet left me. I went into the sitting-room and once again perfunctorily dusted the more obvious surface which had once again become dusty. Then I sat down and let a few thoughts set themselves end to end.

I could mainly congratulate myself on having been fairly cool last night. It is true that I had been sick at her feet and had told her that I loved her in accents which, I noted, had conveyed the gravity of the situation to her at once. But after that I had behaved with dignity. (Which of course I had been enabled to do partly by the intense cozening delight of her presence.) I could not accuse myself of having

then hustled her in any way. But what, oh what, was she feeling about it all by now? Suppose when she telephoned she said coldly that after all she agreed that the matter had best be dropped? I had exhorted her to be adult enough to let go. Perhaps maturer reflection had already made her see the point of this good advice. What had her speech about "love" meant? Did she know what she was talking about? Was it not just a rigmarole which she had invented because she was touched and flattered and excited by my exhibition? Would she draw back? Or if it were the case that she really loved me, what on earth would happen next? But I did not really wonder about what would happen next. If she really loved me it did not matter what happened next.

At about nine o'clock the front doorbell rang. I crept out and peered at the frosted-glass panel. It was Julian. With a quick small effort of self-control I opened the door. She flew in. I managed to kick the door to before she pulled me into the sitting-room. She had her arms round my neck and I held her in a sort of vivid darkness and then my chattering teeth had become a laughing and crying act, and she was laughing and shuddering too and we had sat down on the floor.

"Bradley, thank C»d> I was so afraid you might have changed your mind since yesterday, I couldn't wait till ten."

"Don't be a fool, girl- oh--Oh--You're here--you're here--"Bradley, I do loVe you, I do, it's the real thing. I realized it for absolute certain last night after I left you. I haven't slept, I've been in a sort of mad irHnce- This is it. I've never had it before. One can't be in doubt, c»n one?"

"No," I said. "One can't. If there is any doubt it's not it."

"So you see--"

"What about Mr. Belling?"

"Oh Bradley, don't torment me with Mr. Belling. That was just a nervous craving Hf doesn't exist, nothing exists but this--surely you see Besides l^e had no real feelings, no strength, not like you--"I've impressed y<>u- You're sure you're not just impressed?"

"I love you. I fe^l shattered but at the same time I feel quite calm Doesn't that show that something extraordinary has happened that calm? I fee^ like an archangel. I can talk to you, I can convince you, you'll see everything. There's plenty of time after all, isn't there, Bradley?

Her question, which was really an assertion, touched me in the midst of my joy with a coldish finger. Time, plans, the future. "Yes, my darling, there's plenty of time."

We were sitting I with my legs tucked sideways, she kneeling a little above me, her hands caressing my hair and neck. Then she began taking off my tie- x started to laugh.

"You've got such a beautiful head."

"I thrust it through the curtains of your cradle."

"And I fell in love at first sight."

"I'd lay it under the wheels of your car."

"I wish I could remember when I first saw you!"

It occurred to me suddenly as odd that I could probably establish from an old engagement book, for I had kept them all, what I was doing on the day Julian was born. Resolving some tax problem, lunching with Grey-Pelham.

"When did you first start feeling like this about me? We can talk about that now can't we?"

"We can talk about that now. I think it came on when we were discussing Hamlet."

"Only then! Bradley, you terrify me. Honestly, I think you should think twice about this. Aren't you just acting out of some momentary emotional impulse? Aren't you all mixed up? Won't you feel quite different next week? I thought at least--"You're not serious, Julian? No, no--you can see that this is something very absolute. The past has folded up. There's no history. It's the last trump."

"I know--"One can't calculate, measure. But--oh my dear--we are in a fix, aren't we. Come here." I drew her to me and got her liony head up against my chest.

"I don't see any fix about it," she said into my clean blue pinstriped shirt, of which she was undoing the upper buttons. "Of course we must move very slowly and test ourselves against time and--not be in a hurry to do--anything--"I agree," I said, "that we should not be in a hurry to do--anything." She was not making it easy, however, thrusting her hand inside my shirt, and sighing, and grasping the curly grey hair of my front.

"You don't think that I'm behaving badly, shamelessly?"

"No, Julian, my dear heart."

"I have to touch you. It's so marvellous, such a sort of privilege--"

"I feel a lot of things," I said. "Some of them were expressed by Marvell. But what I mainly feel--no, let me talk--is this. I'm totally unworthy of this love which you are offering to me. I won't go on boringly about my unworthiness, but it's there. I am prepared to carry on slowly as you say and let you convince me and convince yourself that you really feel what you now seem to feel. But meanwhile you mustn't be in any way bound or tied--"But I am tied--"You must be completely free--"Bradley, don't be--"I think we even shouldn't use certain words."

"What words?"

"Love,'

'in love.' "

"I think that's silly. But while we've got eyes I suppose we can give words a rest. Look. Can't you see what you won't name?"

"Please. I honestly think we shouldn't define this thing at all. We must just be quiet and patient and see what happens."

"You sound so anxious."

"I'm terrified."

"I'm not. I've never felt braver in my life. What are you afraid of? And why did you say we were in a fix? What fix are we in?"

"I'm very much older than you are. Very much. That's the fix."

"Oh that. That's simply a convention. It doesn't touch us at all."

"It does touch us," I said. I felt its touch.

"Is that all you meant?"

I hesitated. "Yes." There was much that I would have some day to lay before her. But not today.

"It's not--"Oh Julian, you don't know me, you don't know me--"It's not Christian?"

"What? Christian? God no!"

"Thank heaven. You know, Bradley, when I heard my father talking about bringing you and Christian together I felt such a pang--and that was before--perhaps that began to make me realize how I really felt about you--"Like Emma and Mr. Knightly."

"A pillar in the desert."

"And I was worrying about Christian last night too--"

"No, no, Chris is a nice person and I don't even hate her any more, but she's nothing to me. You have let me out of so many cages. I'll tell you--later--in the time--that we've got."

"Well, if it's not that, the age business doesn't matter a pin, lots of girls prefer older men. So everything's quite clear and plain. I didn't say anything to my parents last night or this morning, as I wanted to be sure you hadn't changed. But I'll tell them today--"Wait a minute! What'll you say to them?"

"That I love you and want to marry you."

"Julian! It's impossible! Julian, I'm older than you think--"Older than the rocks among which you sit. Yes, yes, we know that!"

"It's impossible."

"Bradley, you aren't making any sense. Why do you look like that? You do really love me, don't you? You don't just want a love affair and then goodbye?"

"No--I really love you--"Isn't that something forever?"

"Yes. Real love is about forever--and this is real love--but--"But what?"

"You said we'd move slowly and get to know each other slowly--all this has happened so fast--I'm sure you shouldn't--in any way commit yourself--"I don't mind committing myself. That won't stop us being slow and patient and all that. Anyway, we already know each other, I've known you all my life, you're my Mr. Knightly, and the age gap there--"

"Julian, I think we must keep this thing secret for a while
"Why?"

,, "Because you may change your mind."

"Or because you may?"

"I won't. But you don't know me, you can't. And I'm more than old enough to be your father."

"Do you think I care--?"

"No, but society does and you will one day. You'll see me getting older--"

"Bradley, that's soft."

"I'd very much rather you didn't tell your parents at present."

"All right," she said, after a pause, drawing apart from me, kneeling there, her face suddenly childish with doubt.

The shadow between us was unbearable to me. If I was embarked upon this thing let me be embarked. I would have to trust myself completely to her sense of truth, even to her naivety, even to her inexperience, even to her foolishness. I said, "My perfect darling, you, must do whatever you feel is right to do. I leave it entirely to you. I love you absolutely and I trust you absolutely and what will be will be."

"You think the parents won't like it?"

"They'll hate it."

After that we talked a bit more about Christian and about my marriage and about Priscilla. We talked about Julian's childhood and the times when we had been together. We talked about when I might have started to love her, and about when she might have started to love me. We did not talk about the future. We continued to sit upon the floor like shy animals, like children, stroking each other's hands and each other's hair. We kissed, not often. I sent her away about midday. I felt we should not exhaust each other. We needed to brood and to recover. Of course there was no question of going to bed.

"You don't quite understand," I said. "I am not proposing to go away."

Rachel and Arnold were occupying the two armchairs in my sitting-room. I was sitting on Julian's chair beside the window. There was a murky cloudy light and I had just turned the lamps on. It was the same day, late afternoon.

"What do you propose to do then?" said Arnold.

He had telephoned. Then he and Rachel had arrived. They had, there is no other word for it, marched in. Their presence was like that of an occupying army. To confront familiar people who are suddenly unsmiling and tense with anger and shock is very frightening. I felt frightened. I knew they would "hate it." But I had not expected this big united hostile will. Their sheer incredulity, feigned or otherwise, silenced me, put me to flight. I could explain nothing and felt that I was creating some entirely false impression.

Also I knew that I was not only seeming but also feeling appallingly guilty.

"To stay here," I said, "see a bit of the girl, I suppose--"You mean lead her on?" said Rachel.

"To act naturally, get to know her better--After all we--love each other, it appears--and--"Bradley, get back to reality," said Arnold. "Stop blithering. You're in some sort of dream world at the moment. You're nearly sixty. Julian is twenty. She said at the start that you'd told her your age and that she didn't mind, but you can't mean to take advantage of a sentimental schoolgirl who is flattered by your attentions--"She's not a schoolgirl," I said.

"She's very immature," said Rachel, "and very easily taken in, and--"

"I am not taking her in! I've told her that the age difference makes this thing practically impossible--"It makes it entirely impossible," said Arnold.

"She said the most extraordinary things this afternoon," said Rachel. "I can't think what you can have been saying to her."

"I didn't want her to tell you."

"So you suggested that she should deceive her parents?"

"No, no, not like that--"I can't make out what has happened," said Rachel. "Did you suddenly feel this--urge or whatever it was--and then go and tell her that you found her attractive, and then make a pass at her, or what? What has happened exactly? This must be fairly new?"

"It is new," I said. "But it's very serious. I didn't foresee it or will it, it happened. And then when it turned out that she felt the same--"Bradley," said Arnold, "what you are saying describes nothing which could possibly have happened in the real world. All right, you suddenly felt that she was an attractive girl. London's full of attractive girls. And it's nearly midsummer and you are, perhaps, reaching the age when men make asses of themselves. I've known several people who started sowing some rather unsavoury wild oats at sixty, it's not unusual. But given that you felt randy about my daughter, why the hell didn't you keep quiet about it instead of annoying and upsetting her and confusing her--"She's not annoyed or upset--"She was this

afternoon," said Rachel.

"But you said she was upset--"We told her it was a bad joke."

I thought, My darling, I trust you, I trust you, and I know. I will keep faith with your faith. But at the same time I felt pain and fright. Could I, after what had happened, now doubt it all? She was so very young. And it was indeed, as they said, something very new in the world. When I thought how new I was amazed at the degree of my certainty. But there, above the doubt, was the certainty.

"I can see that you are listening to us at last," said Arnold. "Bradley, you are a decent rational man and a moral being. You can't seriously propose to settle down and explore this emotional mess with Julian? I call it an emotional mess, but thank God it hasn't yet had time to develop into one. Nor will it do so. I shall stop it."

"I don't know what we shall do," I said. "I agree that the whole thing is fantastic. It's almost too good to be true that Julian should love me. It may even not be true. It has surprised me very much indeed. But I am certainly not going now to let the matter drop. I am not going to go quietly away as you suggested earlier, I am not going to stop seeing Julian, I can't. I must find out whether she really loves me or not. Though what follows if she does I don't know at all, perhaps nothing. All this is extremely unusual and may turn out to be very painful, especially to me. I don't want to cause her pain. I don't think I can do her harm. But at this particular point we can't either of us stop. That's all."

"She can stop and she will," said Arnold. "Even if I have to lock her in her bedroom."

"Of course you can stop," said Rachel. "Try to be honest! And do stop saying 'we.' You can't answer for Julian. You haven't been to bed with her, have you?"

"Oh Christ, Christ," said Arnold, "of course he hasn't, he's not a criminal."

"No, I haven't."

"And you won't."

"Rachel, I don't know! Please realize that you are talking to a mad person."

"So you actually admit to being irrational and irresponsible and dangerous!"

"Arnold, please don't get so angry. You are both frightening me and confusing me and that does no good. When I said 'mad' I didn't mean irresponsible--I feel as responsible as if--I'd been given something--I don't know--the bloody Grail--I swear I won't press her or bother her--I'll leave her quite free--she is quite free--"

There was a moment's silence after this speech. I stared at Arnold. He had been sitting very still, speaking quietly but with a

spitting staccato emphasis and with that sort of "edge" to the voice which is intended to terrify. His face under his pale hair was flushed bright pink like a girl's. I tried to check my fear with anger, but could not. I said in a small voice, "Your eloquence suggests to me that Julian did after all convince you both that she was in love."

"She doesn't know what she feels--"

"This isn't the eighteenth century--"Come!" Arnold got up, and motioned with his head to Rachel who rose too. "We've said what we came to say. We'll leave you to--digest it--see there's only one course for you to--adopt--I opened the sitting-room door. I said, "Arnold, please don't be so angry with me. I haven't done anything wrong."

"Yes, you have," said Rachel. "You spoke to her about your feelings."

"All right. I shouldn't have. But to love somebody isn't a sin, there's good in this, we'll find a way to make it--all good--I won't bother her--if you like I won't see her for a week--let her think things over--"It won't do," said Arnold, more gently. "Any sort of half-measures will only make things worse. You must see that, Bradley. Christ, you don't want a mess any more than we do. You must go away. If you see her you'll just make more drama. Best thing for all is stop, absolutely, now. Do see it. Sorry."

Arnold went out of the sitting-room and opened the door of the flat.

Rachel passed me and as she did so she shrank from me and her mouth gave a little wince of disgust. She said tonelessly, "I want you to know, Bradley, that Arnold and I are entirely united in this matter."

"Forgive me, Rachel."

She went on out of the flat, turning her back on me.

Arnold came back. He said, "There's no need just now to act on the letter I sent you. Could I have it back?"

"I've destroyed it."

"No."

"Well. I will not allow any harm to my daughter. Be sure of that. Be--warned."

He went out, closing the front door softly. I was panting with emotion. I ran to the telephone and dialled the Ealing number. There was a pause and then the high buzz of "number unobtainable." I dialled several times, with the same result. I felt as if I had been cut off by an axe at the knees. I held my head in a violent grip, trying to compose myself and think. The urgency of the need to see Julian seethed all round me, blotting out my vision. I was being blinded and stung to death by bees. I was suffocating. I ran out into the court and began to walk at random along Charlotte Street, then along Windmill

Street, then along Tottenham Court Road. After a while it began to seem probable that if I did not take some violent and decisive action soon I would collapse. I hailed a taxi and told the man to drive to Ealing.

I stood under the copper beech at the corner of the road. I put my hand on the close-grained trunk of the tree and it felt absurdly there, complacent with indifferent reality. It was evening now, twilight time, the evening of that same lengthy fantastic eventful day.

The evening was overcast, the dour thick light turning a little purple, the air warm and motionless. I could smell dust, as if the quiet tedious streets all around me had dissolved into endless dunes of dust. I thought about this morning and how we had seemed to have all the time in the world. And now there seemed to be no more time. I also thought that if only I had had the wit to take that taxi at once I might have arrived here before Arnold and Rachel. What was happening? I crossed the road and began to walk slowly down on the other side.

I stood now upon the opposite pavement and regarded the house and wondered what to do. I considered the idea of hanging around until three o'clock in the morning and then penetrating into the garden and using one of Arnold's ladders to climb up to Julian's window. But I did not want to become a nightmare figure to her, a night intruder, a secret man. The greatness of this morning had been its lucid openness. This morning I had felt like a cave-dweller emerging into the sun. She was the truth of my life. I would not become a sort of burglar or pickpocket in hers. Besides. There were so many unknown things. What was she thinking now?

As I stood there in that thick oppressive urban dusk breathing the breath of fear, smelling the dunes of dust, I became aware of being looked at by a figure standing in the long unlighted landing window of the house I was studying. I could see the figure framed in the window and the pallor of the face regarding me. It was Rachel. We looked at each other in an awful immobility of quietness for about a minute. Then I turned away, like an animal from a human stare, and began to pace the pavement, to and fro, to and fro, waiting. The street lamps came on.

After about five minutes Arnold came out. I recognized his figure though I could not see his face. I began to walk back up the road toward the copper beech and he followed, then walked beside me in silence. A close-by lamp-post was illuminating one side of the tree, making the leaves a transparent glowing winy purple, and separating them out with clear shadows, each from each. We stepped into the rich gathered darkness underneath the tree, trying to see each other's faces.

Arnold said, "I'm sorry I got so excited."

"O. K."

"Everything's got much clearer now."

"Good."

"I'm sorry I said all those ludicrous things--about lawyers and so on."

"So 'm I."

"I hadn't realized how little had happened."

"Oh."

"I mean, I hadn't got the time scheme. I somehow gathered from what Julian said this afternoon that this whatever it is had been going on for some time. But now I understand it's only been going on since yesterday evening."

"A lot has happened since yesterday evening," I said. "You should understand, you seem to have been fairly busy lately yourself."

"You must have thought Rachel and I were being ridiculously solemn this afternoon about very little."

"I see you're playing it differently now," I said.

"What?"

"Go on."

"Now Julian has explained everything to us and it's all perfectly clear."

"And what does it look like?"

"Of course she was upset and touched. She felt pity for you, she said."

"I don't believe you. But go on."

"And of course she was flattered--"What's she doing now?"

"Now? Lying on her bed and crying her eyes out."

"Christ."

"But don't worry about her, Bradley."

"Oh, I won't."

"I wanted to explain--She has now told us everything, and we can see that this is really nothing at all, just a storm in a teacup, and she agrees."

"Does she?"

"She asks you to forgive her for being so emotional and silly, and she says will you please not try to see her just now."

"Arnold, did she really say this?"

' "Yes.

I gripped him by the shoulders and pulled him with me a few steps so that the lamplight fell onto his face. He reacted convulsively for a moment, then stood still in my hold. "Arnold, did she say that?"

"Yes."

I let go of him, and we both moved instinctively back into the shadow. His face leered at me, twisted up with will and anxiety and

deep intention. It was not the pink angry hostile face of earlier. It was a hard determined face which told me nothing.

"Embarrassed?"

"Yes, and it will be most considerate of you to sheer off. Be kind to the child. Let her recover her dignity. Dignity matters so much to a young girl. She feels she's lost face by taking it all so seriously and she feels she's made a bit of an exhibition of herself. If you saw her now she'd just giggle and blush and feel sorry for you and ashamed of herself. She sees now it was silly to take it all so seriously and make a drama of it. She admits that she was flattered, it turned her head a bit, and it was an exciting surprise. But when she saw we weren't amused she sobered up. She understands now that it's all an impossible nonsense, well, she understands, in practical matters she's an intelligent girl. Do use enough imagination to see how she must feel now! She's not such a fool as to imagine you're suffering from any great passion either. She says she's very sorry and will you please not try to see her for a while yet. It's better to have a bit of an interval. We're going on holiday soon anyway, the day after tomorrow, in fact. I've decided to take her to Venice. She's always wanted to go. We've been to Rome and Florence, but never there, and she's got a thing about it. So we're going to take a flat, probably spend the rest of the summer. Julian's absolutely thrilled. I think a change of scene would help my book too. So there we are. I'm awfully sorry I got so worked up this afternoon. You must have thought me a solemn idiot. I hope you aren't angry with me now?"

"Not at all," I said.

"I'm just trying to act rightly. Well, we all are. Fathers have duties. Please, please try to understand. It's kindest to Julian to play this quite cool. You will sheer off and keep quiet, please? She won't want any heavy letters or anything. Leave the kid alone and let her begin to enjoy herself again. You don't want to haunt her like a ghost, do you? You will leave her alone now, won't you, Bradley?"

"All right," I said. "Yes."

"I can rely on you?"

"Bradley, you do relieve my mind. I knew you'd act decently, for the child's sake. Thank you, thank you. God, I'm relieved. I'll run back to Rachel. She sends her love, by the way."

"Who does?"

"Rachel."

"Give her mine. Good night. I hope you have a good time in Venice."

He called me back. "By the way, you did really destroy that letter?"

"Yes."

I made my way home thinking the thoughts which I will describe in the next section. When I got back I found a note from Francis asking me to call on Priscilla. w.

I had so much loved and trusted Julian's instinct for frankness that I had not even had the sense to advise her to tone it all down a bit. I had not even, fool that I was, really foreseen how awful the thing would look to her parents. I had been far too absorbed in the sacredness of my own feelings to make the cold effort to be objective here. And what an idiot I had been, to go farther back, not to tone it all down myself! I could have broken it to her slowly, moved in on her gradually, wooed her quietly, hinted, insinuated, whispered. There could have been chaste and then less chaste kisses. Why did I have to sick it up all at once like that and put her in a frenzy? But of course this slow-motion idea was only tolerable in retrospect in the light of the knowledge that I now had of her love for me. If I had started to tell her anything at all I could not have stopped myself from telling her everything straightaway. The anxiety would have been too terrible. I did not now meditate upon, or even entertain, the thought that I might have been and ought to have been silent. I did not reject this idea. Only it seemed to belong to some very remote period of the past. For better or worse, that was no longer in question, and guilt about it did not form part of my distress.

I woke to the sound of dustbin lids being clattered by Greeks at the end of the court. I rose quickly into a world which had become, even since last night, much more frightful. Last night there had been horrors, but there had been a sense of drama, a feeling of obstacles to be overcome, and beyond it all the uplifting certainty of her love. Today I felt crazy with doubt and fear. She was only a young girl after all. Could she, against such fierce parental opposition, hold to her faith and keep her vision clear? And if they had lied to me about her was it not likely that they had lied to her about me? They would tell her that I had said I would give her up. And I had said it. Would she understand? Would she be strong enough to go on believing in me? How strong was she? How little in fact I knew her. Was it really all in my mind? And supposing they took her away? Supposing I really could not find her? Surely she would write to me. But supposing she did not? Perhaps, although she did love me, she had decided that the whole thing was a mistake? That would, after all, be a thoroughly rational decision.

The telephone rang but it was only Francis asking me to come and see Priscilla. I said I would come later. I asked to talk to her but she would not come to the telephone. About ten Christian rang and I put the receiver back at once. I rang the Ealing number but got "number unobtainable" again. Arnold must have somehow put the

telephone out of action during that period of panic in the afternoon. I prowled about the house wondering how long I could put off the moment when it would be impossible not to go to Ealing. My head was aching terribly. I did try quite hard during this time to put my thoughts in order. I speculated about my intentions and her feelings. I sketched plans for a dozen or so different turns of events. I even tried to feign imagining what it would be like really to despair: that is, to believe that she did not love me, had never loved me, and that all I could decently do was to vanish from her life. Then I realized that I did despair, I was in despair, nothing could be worse than this experience of her absence and her silence. And yesterday she had been in my arms and we had looked forward into a huge quiet abyss of time, and we had kissed each other without frenzy and without terror, with thoughtful temperate quiet joy. And I had even sent her away when she did not want to go. I had been insane. Perhaps that was the only time which we should ever, ever have together. Perhaps it was something which would never, never come again.

Waiting in fear is surely one of the most awful of human tribulations. The wife at the pit head. The prisoner awaiting interrogation. The shipwrecked man on the raft in the empty sea. The sheer extension of time is felt then as physical anguish. The minutes, each of which might bring relief, or at least certainty, pass fruitlessly and manufacture an increase of horror. As the minutes of that morning passed away I felt a cold deadly increase of my conviction that all was lost. This was how it would be from now on and forever. She would never communicate with me again. I endured this until half past eleven and then I decided I must go to Ealing and try to see her by force if necessary. I even thought of arming myself with some weapon. But suppose she was already gone?

It had begun to rain. I had put on my macintosh and was standing in the hall wondering if tears would help. I imagined pushing Arnold violently aside and leaping up the stairs. But what then?

The telephone rang and I lifted it. The voice of an operator said, "Miss Baffin is calling you from an Ealing call box, will you pay for the call?"

"What? Is that-?"

"Miss Baffin is calling you--"

"Yes, yes, I'll pay, yes--"Bradley. It's me."

"Oh darling--Oh thank God--"Bradley, quickly, I must see you, I've run away."

"Oh good, oh my darling, I've been in such a--"Me too. Look, I'm in a telephone box near Ealing Broadway station, I haven't any money."

"I'll come and fetch you in a taxi."

"I'll hide in a shop, I'm so terrified of--"Oh my darling girl--"Tell the taxi to drive slowly past the station, I'll see you."

"Yes, yes."

"But, Bradley, we can't be at your place, that's where they'll go."

"Never mind them. I'm coming to fetch you."

• "What happened?"

"Oh, Bradley, it's been such a nightmare "But what happened?"

"I was an absolute idiot, I told them all about it in a sort of triumphant aggressive way, I felt so happy, I couldn't conceal it or muffle it, and they were livid, at least at first they simply couldn't believe it, and then they rushed off to see you, and I should have run away then, only I was feeling sort of combative and I wanted another session and then when they came back they were much worse, I've never seen my father so upset and angry, he was quite violent."

"God, he didn't beat you?"

"No, no, but he shook me till I was quite giddy and he broke a lot of things in my room--"Oh my sweet--"Then I started to cry and couldn't stop."

"Yes, when I came round--"

"You came round?"

"They didn't tell you?"

"Dad said later on that he'd seen you again. He said you'd agreed to give it all up. I didn't believe him of course."

"Oh my brave dear! He told me you didn't want to see me. Of course I didn't believe him either."

She said, "I love my parents. I suppose. Well, of course I do. Especially my father. Anyway I've never doubted it. But there are things one can't forgive. It's the end of something. And the beginning of something." She turned to me with gravity, her face very tired, a little puffy and battered and creased with much crying, and grim too. One saw what she would look like when she was fifty. And for an instant her unforgiving face reminded me of Rachel in the terrible room.

"Oh Julian, I've brought irrevocable things to you."

"Yes."

"I haven't wrecked your life, have I, you aren't angry with me for having involved you in such trouble?"

"That's your silliest remark yet. Anyway, the row went on for hours, mainly between me and my father, and then when my mother started in he shouted that she was jealous of me, and she shouted that he was in love with me, and then she started to cry and I screamed, and, oh Bradley, I didn't know ordinary educated middle-class English

people could behave the way we behaved last night."

"That shows how young you are."

"At last they went off downstairs and I could hear them going on rowing down there, and my mother crying terribly, and I decided I'd had enough and I'd clear out, and then I found they'd locked me in! I'd never been locked in anywhere, even when I was small, I can't tell you how--it was a sort of moment of--illumination--like when people suddenly know--they've got to have a revolution. I was just eternally not going to stand for being locked in."

"You shouted and banged?"

"No, nothing like that. I knew I couldn't get out of the window, it's too high. I sat on my bed and I cried a lot of course. You know, it seems silly in the middle of all this real sort of--carnage--but I was so sad about the little things of mine my father broke. He broke two sort of cups and all my china animals--"Julian, I can't bear this--"And it was so frightening--and sort of humiliating--He didn't find this, though, it was under my pillow." Julian took out of the pocket of her dress the gilt snuffbox, A Friend's Gift.

"Bradley, we passed this stage long ago. When I was sitting on my bed and looking at the broken china on the floor and feeling my life so broken, I felt so strong too and calm in the middle of it all and quite certain about you and quite certain about myself. Look at me. Certainty. Calm." She did look calm too, sitting there beside me with her weary lucid face and her blue dress with white willow leaves on it and her brown shiny young knees and our hands piled together on her lap and the gilt snuffbox in the loop of her skirt.

"You must have more time to think, we can't--"Anyway, about eleven, and that was another last straw, I had to shout and beg them to let me out to go to the lavatory. Then my father came in again and started off on a new tack, being very kind and understanding. It was then he said that he'd seen you again and that you'd said you'd give me up, which of course I knew wasn't true. And then he said he'd take me to Athens--"He told me Venice. I've been in Venice all night."

"He was afraid you'd follow. I was as cold as ice by this time and I'd already made a plan to pretend to agree with anything he said and then to escape as soon as I could. So I acted a climb-down and how a treat like going to Athens made all the difference and--thank God you weren't listening--and--"I know. I did the same. I actually did tell him I'd sheer off. I felt like Saint Peter."

"Bradley, I was so tired by then, God yesterday was a long day, and I don't know if I convinced him, but he said he was very sorry he'd been so bad, and I think he was sorry too, only I couldn't bear his becoming emotional and soppy and wanting to kiss me and so on, and I said I must sleep so he went away at last and my God he

locked the door again!"

"Did you sleep?"

"Julian, I feel so terrible, so responsible. I'm glad you felt sorry for your mother. You mustn't hate them, you must pity them. In a way they're right and we're wrong--"Ever since they locked that door I began to feel like a monster. But I was a happy monster. Sometimes one has got to become monstrous in order to survive. I'm old enough to know that, anyway."

I touched her, and through my scorched palm felt and desired the whole of this young sweet guileless being so suddenly and so miraculously given to me. I withdrew my hand and moved slightly away from her. It was almost too much.

"Julian, my heroine, my queen--oh where can we go--we can't go back to my flat."

"I know. They'll be there. Bradley, I must be properly alone with you somewhere."

"Yes. Even if it's only to think."

"What do you mean, even if it's only to think?"

"I feel so guilty about all this--what you called carnage. We haven't decided anything, we mustn't, we don't know--"Bradley, how brave are you really? Are you going to lead me back to my parents? Are you going to stray me like a cat? You are my home now. Bradley, do you love me?"

"Yes, yes, yes, yes."

"Then you must be bold and free and show qualities of leadership. Think, Bradley, there must be some sort of secret place we can go, even if it's only a hotel."

"Oh Julian, we can't go to a hotel. There isn't anywhere secret we can go to--Oh my God, yes there is! There is, there is, there is!"

The door of the flat was open. Had I left it open? Was Arnold inside waiting for me?

I went in quietly and stood in the hall listening. Then I heard a nearby rustling sound which seemed to come from my bedroom. Then a curious noise such as some bird might make, a sort of descending "woo-oo." I stood stiffly, prickling with alarm. Then there was the unmistakable sound of someone yawning. I went forward and opened the bedroom door.

"I decided to come back to you. They tried to stop me but I came. They turned me over to the doctors. They wanted me to stay in the hospital but I wouldn't. There were mad people there, I'm not mad. I had some of the shock treatment. It makes you feel terrible. You scream and throw yourself across the room. They ought to hold you. I bruised my arm. Look." She was speaking very slowly. She began laboriously to pull off the navy-blue jacket.

"Priscilla, you can't stay here. I've got somebody waiting for me. We're just going to leave London." Julian was in Oxford Street buying clothes with my money.

"Look." Priscilla was rolling up the sleeve of her blouse. There was a large mottled bruise on her upper arm. "Or do you think they were holding me? Perhaps they were holding me. They have a sort of strait jacket they use but they didn't put it on me. I think. I can't remember. It rattles one's head so. It can't be good. And now they've done something to my brain that won't come right again ever. I didn't understand before what it was. I wanted to ask you about it but you didn't come. And Arnold and Christian were always talking and laughing, I couldn't be quiet in myself for their racket and their cackling. I felt such a stranger there, like a poor lodger. One must be with one's own people. And I want you to help me with the divorce. I felt so ashamed with them because everything in their life was going so well and they were so sort of successful. I couldn't talk about what I wanted with them and they were always in a hurry--and then they got me to start out on these electric shocks. One shouldn't do things in a hurry, one always regrets it. Oh Bradley, I wish I hadn't had those shocks, I can feel my brain's half destroyed with them. It stands to reason, people aren't supposed to have electric shocks are they?"

"Where's Arnold?" I said.

"He's just gone away with Francis."

"He was here?"

"Yes. He came after me. I just walked out after breakfast. Not that I had any breakfast, I can't eat these days at all, I can't bear the smell of food. Bradley, I want you to go with me to the lawyer, and I want you to go with me to the hairdresser, I must get my hair rinsed. I think I can just do that, it won't be too much for me. Then I think I'll rest. What did Roger say about my mink stole? I kept worrying about that. Why didn't you visit me? I kept asking for you. I want you to go with me to the lawyer this morning."

"Priscilla, I can't go anywhere with you this morning. I've got to get out of London quickly. Oh why did you come here!"

"What did Roger say about my mink stole?"

"He sold it. He'll give you the money."

"Oh no! It was such a lovely one, such a special one--"

"Please don't cry--"I'm not crying. I came all the way from Netting Hill by myself, and I shouldn't, I'm ill. I think I'll sit in the sitting-room for a while. Could you make me some tea?" She got up heavily and pushed past me. I smelt a rank animal smell off her mingled with some sort of hospital odour. Formaldehyde perhaps. Her face looked ponderous and sleepy and her lower lip drooped with an effect resembling a sneer. She sat down slowly and carefully in the

small armchair and put her feet on a footstool.

"Priscilla, you can't stay here! I've got to leave London!"

She yawned hugely, her nose snubbing up, her eyes squeezed, one hand questing through her blouse to scratch her armpit. She rubbed her eyes and then began to undo the middle buttons of her blouse. "I keep yawning and yawning and I keep scratching and scratching and my legs ache and I can't keep still. I expect it's the electricity. Bradley, you won't leave me will you, you're all I've got now, you can't go away. What were you saying? Did Roger really sell my mink stole?"

"I'll make you some tea," I said to get out of the room. I went to the kitchen and actually put the kettle on. I was horribly upset at the sight of Priscilla, but of course there was no question of changing my plans. I just could not think what to do immediately. I had a rendezvous with Julian in half an hour's time. If I failed to turn up she would come straight here. Meanwhile Arnold, unaccountably absent, might turn up at any moment.

Someone came in through the front door. I issued quickly from the kitchen, ready to make a dash for freedom. I charged into Francis with such force that I butted him back out of the doorway. We held onto each other.

"Where's Arnold?"

"I strayed him," said Francis, "but you haven't much time."

I pulled Francis outside into the court. I wanted to be able to see Arnold coming. Francis was such a relief, I held firmly onto both his sleeves in case he should run away, which however he seemed unlikely to do. He smirked at me, looking pleased with himself.

"Has he told you--?"

"He told Christian who told me. Chris is enjoying it all like mad."

"Francis,, listen. I'm going away with Julian today. I want you to stay with Priscilla here, or at Notting Hill, wherever she wants to be. Here's a cheque, a big one, and I'll give you more."

"I say, thanks! Where are you going?"

"Never mind. I'll telephone you at intervals to see how Priscilla is. Thanks for your help. Now I must pack one or two things and get out."

"Brad, look. I brought this back. I'm afraid it's properly broken now. I broke off the foot trying to straighten it out." He thrust something into my hand. It was the little bronze of the buffalo lady.

We went back into the house and I dropped the latch on the street door and shut the door of the flat. There was a sort of screeching noise inside the flat. It was the whistling electric kettle announcing that the water was boiling. "Make tea, would you,

Francis."

I ran into my bedroom and hurled clothes into a suitcase. Then I returned to the sitting-room.

Priscilla was sitting bolt upright now, looking frightened. "What was that noise?"

"The kettle."

"Who is it there?"

"Just Francis. He'll stay with you. I've got to go."

"When will you be back? You aren't going properly away are you, for days?"

"I'm not sure. I'll ring up."

"Oh Bradley, please, please don't leave me. It's so frightening, everything frightens me now, I get so frightened at night. You are my brother, I know you'll look after me, you can't leave me with strangers. And I don't know what to do for the best and you're the only person I can talk to. I think I won't go and see the lawyer yet. I don't know what to do about Roger. Oh I wish I'd never left him, I want Roger, I want Roger--Roger would pity me if he saw me now."

"It's broken now," she said.

"Yes. Francis broke it trying to mend it."

"I don't want it now any more."

I picked it up. One of the buffalo's front legs was broken off jaggedly near the body. I laid the bronze on its side in the lacquer cabinet.

"It's quite broken now. Oh how sad, how sad- "Priscilla, stop it!"

"Oh dear, I do want Roger, Roger was mine, we belonged together, he was mine and I was his."

"Don't be silly, Priscilla. Roger's a dead loss."

"I want you to go to Roger and tell him I'm sorry- "Certainly not!"

"I want Roger, dear Roger, I want him- I tried to kiss her, at least I approached my face to the dark soiled line of the grey hair, but she jerked her head as I stooped and rapped me hard on the jaw. "Good-bye, Priscilla, I'll ring up."

"Oh don't go away and leave me, please, please, please--I was at the door. She stared up at me now with huge slow tears coming out of her eyes, her gaping mouth all red and wet. I turned from her. Francis was just emerging from the kitchen with the tea tray. I saluted him and ran out of the house and along the court. At the end of the court I paused and peered cautiously out round the corner.

Arnold and Christian were just getting out of a taxi about ten yards away. Arnold was paying the taxi man. Christian saw me. She at once moved, turning her back to me and placing herself between me

and Arnold.

I dodged back. There is a tiny slit of an alleyway just before the court debouches and I wedged myself into this, and saw almost instantly Arnold striding past, his face set hard with anxiety and purpose. Christian followed him more slowly, her eyes questing about. She saw me again and she made a gesture of a sort of Oriental voluptuousness, a kind of amused sensuous homage, lifting her hands palm upwards and then bringing them sinuously down to her sides like a ballet dancer. She did not pause. I waited some moments and then emerged.

Part Three

- - s, he had so much enjoyed our shopping. She conducted it. Boldly she chose food, cleaning stuff, washing stuff, kitchen things. She even bought a pretty blue dustpan and brush with flowers painted on. And an apron. And a sun hat. We loaded up the hired car. Some prophetic wit had made me keep my licence up to date. But, after earless years, I was driving cautiously.

It was five o'clock of the same day and we were far from London. We were in a village, the car was parked outside the village shop. Grass grew between the paving stones and the sloping sun was giving to each blade of grass its own individual brown little shadow. There was still quite a long way to go.

Seeing Julian playing housekeeper so busily and naturally and ordering me about as if we had been married for years made me sick with joy. I dissembled the intensity of my delight so as not to make her self-conscious. I bought some sherry and some wine because that is what couples do, but I felt I should be perpetually drunk on sheer pleasure. At moments I almost wanted to be alone so as to meditate more single-mindedly upon what had happened. When we had driven on a bit and I had stopped to relieve myself in a wood, and as I stood looking down at a criss-crossy linoleum of pine needles, and a little copse of frondy moss in a tree root and a few stars of scarlet pimpernel, I felt like a great poet. These tiny things stood before me, the concrete embodiment of something resonant and huge, of histories and ecstasies and tears.

Human happiness is rarely in the best of circumstances without shadows, and an almost pure happiness can be a terror to itself. My happiness at this time, though intense, was far from pure, and in the midst of all this mad joy (watching Julian buy the dustpan and brush, for instance) I soon started rehearsing terrors and miseries. Of course there was vengeful Arnold, resentful Rachel, miserable Priscilla. There was the quaint and curious fact that I had lied about my age. There was a huge question mark over the immediate future. But these matters were, now that I was with Julian, problems rather than nightmares. Soon and in solitude I would tell her everything and she would be the just judge. The fact of loving and being loved can

make (in a way which is of course sometimes illusory) even the most practical of difficulties seem trivial or even senseless. Nor did I in any vulgar sense fear exposure. We would be secret. No one knew of this place. I had told my plans to nobody.

What troubled me as I drove along in that very blue twilight between fat flowery chestnut trees and saw the full moon like a dish of Jersey cream above a barley field which was still catching the light of the sun, were two things, one vast and cosmic, the other horribly precise. The cosmic trouble was that I was feeling, in some way quite unconnected with ordinary speculations about what might happen, that I should certainly lose Julian. I did not doubt now that she loved me. But I felt a kind of absolute despair, as if we had loved already for a thousand years and were condemned to become weary of something so perfect. I raced about the planet like lightning, I put a girdle round the galaxy, and was back in the next second gasping with this despair. Those who have loved will understand me. I was giddy with fear. A great loop had been made in the continuum of time and space and across the mouth of it Julian's right hand held my left. All this had happened before, perhaps a million times, and because of this was doomed. There was no ordinary future any more, only this ecstatic tormented terrified present. The future had passed through the present like a sword. We were already, even eye to eye and lip to lip, deep in the horrors to come.

My other trouble was wondering, when we reached Patara and I tried to make love to Julian, whether I should succeed.

So we started arguing.

"You're thinking too much, Bradley, I can see you are. We'll solve all these problems. We'll have Priscilla to live with us."

"We won't be living anywhere."

"What do you mean?"

"We just won't. There isn't any future. We shall go on and on driving in this car forever. That's all there is."

"You mustn't speak like that, it's false. Look, I've bought brown bread and toothpaste and a dustpan."

"Yes. That's a miracle. But it's like the fossils which religious men used to think God put there when He created the world in 4000 b.c. so that we could develop an illusion of the past."

"I don't understand."

"We have an illusion of the future."

"That's wicked talk and a betrayal of love."

"Our love is in the nature of a closed system. It is complete within itself. It has no accidents and no extension."

"Please don't talk that abstract sort of language, it's a way of lying."

"Maybe. But we have no language in which to tell the truth about ourselves, Julian."

"Well, I have. I'm going to marry you. You will write a great book. I will try to write a great book."

"Do you really believe this?"

"Yes. Bradley, you're tormenting me, I think you're doing it on purpose."

"Perhaps. I feel so connected with you. I am you. I must stir a little, even cause pain, if I'm to apprehend you at all."

"Cause me pain then, I'll bear it gladly, but it must be inside our security."

"Oh everything's inside. That's the trouble."

"I don't know what you mean by 'inside.' But you seem to be speaking as if it were all an illusion, as if you could leave me."

"I suppose it could be interpreted like that."

"But we've only just found each other."

"We found each other millions of years ago, Julian."

"Yes, yes, I know. I feel that too, but really, ordinary really, since Covent Garden it's only two days."

"I'll meditate on that."

"Well, meditate properly. Bradley, you couldn't leave me, what nonsense are you talking."

"No, I couldn't leave you, my utter darling, but you could leave me. I don't mean anything about doubting your love. It's just that whatever miracle made us will automatically also break us. We are for breaking, our smash is what it's for."

"I won't let you talk like this. I'll hold you and silence you with love."

"Mind out. This is tricky light for driving in."

"Will you stop a minute?"

"No."

"Do you really think I could leave you?"

"Sub specie aeternitatis, yes. You have done so already."

"You know I don't understand Latin."

"A pity your education was so neglected."

"Bradley, I shall get angry with you."

"So we are quarrelling already. Shall I drive you back to Ealing?"

"You are deliberately hurting and spoiling."

"I am not a very nice character. You must get to know me some time."

"I do know you. I know you inside out and backwards."

"You do and you don't."

"Do you doubt my love?"

"I fear the gods."

"I fear nothing."

"Perfection is instant despair. Instant despair. Nothing to do with time."

"If you despair you doubt that I love you."

"Maybe."

•"Will you please stop driving?"

"What can I do to prove that I love you absolutely?"

"I don't see that you can do anything."

"I shall jump out of the car."

"Don't be silly."

"I shall."

And the next moment she had.

There was a sound like a small explosion, a puff of air, and she was gone from my side. The door gaped, cracked open, swung and slammed back. The seat beside me was empty. The car careered onto the grass verge and stopped.

I looked back and saw her in the half-light lying in a dark motionless heap by the side of the road.

I have had terrible moments in my life. Many of them came to me after this one. But this was, seen in retrospect, the most beautiful, the purest and the most absolutely punishing.

Gasping with terror and anguish I got myself out of the car and ran back. The road was empty and silent, the air filled with atoms of darkening blue, defeating the sight.

Oh the poor frailty of the human form, its egg-shell vulnerability! How can this precarious crushable machine of flesh and bones and blood survive on this planet of hard surfaces and relentless murderous gravity? I had felt the crash and crunch of her body upon the road.

Her head was in the grass, her legs hunched up on the verge. The moment of stillness when I got to her was the worst. I knelt beside her, moaning aloud, not daring to touch or move that perhaps terribly damaged body. Was she conscious, would she in a moment begin to scream with pain? My hands hovered about her with a condemned tragic helplessness. I had a very different future now as I ineptly questioned that inert and scattered being that I did not dare even to fold in my arms.

Then Julian said, "Sorry, Bradley."

"Are you badly hurt?" I said in a grating breathless voice.

"Don't--think--so--' Then she sat up and put her arms round my neck.

"Oh Julian, be careful, are you all right, is anything broken?"

"No--I'm sure--not--Look, I fell onto these humpy cushions of

grass or moss or--"I thought you fell on the road."

"No, I just--grazed my leg again--and I banged my face--ouf! I think I'm perfectly all right though, it just hurts--Wait a moment, let me just try moving--Yes, I'm perfectly all right--Oh I am sorry--I took her in my arms properly then and we held onto each other, half lying among the little mossy grassy hillocks beside a ditch full of white flowering nettles. The creamy moon had become smaller and paler and more metallic. Darkness began to thicken about us in the dense air as we held each other in silence.

"Bradley, I'm getting cold, I've lost my sandals."

"Bradley, please. I hear a car, someone will come."

I got up, burning, and helped her up, and then in fact a car did come by and its lights showed her legs, the blue of her dress which matched her eyes, and a flash of her shaggy brown-gold mane. It also showed her sandals lying together upon the road.

"There's blood on your leg."

"It's just a graze."

"You're limping."

"No, just stiff."

We walked back to the car and I turned on the headlights and made an intricate bower of green leaves in the middle of the dark. We got into the car and held each other's hands.

"It won't be necessary to do that again, Julian."

"I'm very sorry."

Then we drove on in silence, her hand on my knee. For the last bit she read the map by torchlight. We crossed a railway line and a canal into a sort of empty flat land. There were no lights of houses to be seen now. The lights of the car showed how the roadway faded into a stony verge of smooth grey pebbles and vivid green wiry grass. We paused and turned at a featureless crossroads where Julian turned her torch onto the ringer post. The road turned into a stony track along which we bumped at five miles per hour. And at last the headlights swung round and revealed two white gate posts and the name written in bold Italian lettering: patara. The car moved onto gravel and the lights jerked over red-brick walls and we came to a halt outside a narrow latticed porch. Julian already had the key, she had been holding it for miles. I peered at our haven. It was a little square red-brick bungalow. The agent had been a trifle romantic. "It's marvellous," said Julian. She let me in.

All the lights were on. Julian had run from room to room. She had pulled back the sheets of the double divan bed. "I don't think this is aired at all, it's quite damp. Oh Bradley, let's go down to the sea straightaway, shall we? Then I'll cook supper."

I looked at the bed. "It's late, my darling. Are you sure you're

all right after that fall?"

"Of course! I think I'll just change, it's got a bit chilly, and then we'll go down to the sea, it must be just there, I think I can hear it."

I went out of the front door and listened. The sound of the sea sieving pebbles came in a regular harsh grating sigh from over the top of some little eminence, sand dunes perhaps, just in front of me. The moon was slightly hazed over but giving out a golden, not silvery, illumination by which I could see the white garden fencing, ragged shrubs and the outline of a single tree. A sense of emptiness and level land. Air moving softly, salty. I felt a mixture of bliss and pure fear. After a few moments I went back into the house. Silence.

I went into the bedroom. Julian, in a mauve-and-white flowered petticoat with a white fringe was lying on the bed deeply asleep. Her glowing brown hair was spread all over the pillow and half over her face in a silky network like part of a beautiful shawl. She lay on her back with her throat exposed as if to the knife. Her shoulders, pale in colour, were as creamy as the moon at dusk. Her knees were a little drawn up, the bare muddied feet sideways and pointed. Her hands, also brown with earth, had found each other and nestled between her breasts like a pair of animals. Her right thigh, below the line of the white fringe, was red and scraped in two places, once where she had climbed over the fence, once where she had thrown herself out of the car. She had indeed had an eventful day.

So had I. I sat and brooded over her and pondered a hundred things. I had no intention of waking her, though I did wonder if I should bathe her thigh. The long scratches looked quite clean. This sudden magical withdrawal into unconsciousness was just what I had been wanting at different times during the day, to be with her and yet not with her. And now as I sat and sighed beside her there was a strange pleasure in not touching her. After a while I lightly lifted the bedclothes over her, laying down the folded sheet just below those clasped and nestling hands, and I wondered what I had done, or more perhaps what she had done, since it was more her will than mine which had so completely transformed our lives. Perhaps tomorrow morning it would all seem to her like a dreadful dream. Perhaps tomorrow I would be driving a weeping girl back to London. For that too I must be faithfully ready, for I had already been given a fortune which I did not in the least deserve. How wonderful and terrible it had been when she leapt out of the car. But what did it mean except that she was young and the young love extremes? She was a child of extremes and I was a puritan and old. Would I ever make love to her? Ought I to? Would I be able to?

"Look, Bradley, an animal's skull, all washed by the sea. What

is it, a sheep?"

"A sheep yes." We'll take it back.

"There are all those stones and shells to take back too."

"Well, we can get the car down, can't we?"

"I think so. There's that cry again. What did you say it was?"

"The curlew. It says its name. Oh Bradley, look at this beautiful piece of wood, the way the sea has had it, it looks like Chinese writing."

"Are we to bring that too?"

"Of course."

I took the square piece of wood, all its wrinkles smoothed and joined by the sea water until it looked like a sort of delicate sketch of an old face, a sketch such as some Italian artist, Leonardo perhaps, might make in a rather abstract way in his notebook. I took the sheep's skull. The skull, bereft of teeth but otherwise fairly complete, had been in the sea for some time. There was nothing sharp upon it. It had been smoothed and caressed and polished until it seemed more like a work of art, some exquisite fabrication in ivory, than one of nature's remnants. The bone was densely smooth to the touch, warmed by the sun, the colour of thick cream, the colour of Julian's shoulders.

"Bradley, are you awake? Tea, coffee, milk, sugar? How little know about you."

"Indeed. Tea, milk, sugar. Did you see my socks?"

"I love your socks. We're going straight down to the sea." And we did. We had a picnic breakfast with milky tea in a thermos flask and bread and butter and jam, down on the flat stones of the beach, just beside where the sea, much more gently than last night, was touching the clean fringe of the land, which it had itself fashioned to be its pure spouse and counterpart, withdrawing to breathe and returning again to touch. Behind us were wind-combed sand dunes and yellow arches of long reedy grass and blue sky the colour of Julian's eyes. Before us was the calm cold English sea, diamond-sparkling and rather dark even under the sun.

There have been many moments of happiness. But that first breakfast beside the sea had a simplicity and an intensity which it would be hard to match. It was not even plagued by hope. It was just perfect communion and rest and the kind of joy which comes when the beloved and one's own soul become so mingled with the external world that there is a place made for once upon the planet where stones and tufts of grass and transparent water and the quiet sound of the wind can really be. It was perhaps the other side of the diptych from last night's moment of seeing Julian in the twilight lying motionless beside the road. But it was not really connected, as

moments of pure joy are not really connected with anything. Any human life which has such moments has surely put a trembling finger upon nature's most transcendent aim.

As I sat and watched her preparing our lunch (she had told me quite correctly that she could not cook) I marvelled at her sheer grasp of the situation, her absolute hereness, and I tried to put off all anxiety, as it seemed that she had done, and to keep at bay the demons of abstraction in protest against which she had hurled herself from the moving car. In the afternoon we drove across the flowery courtyard to collect our trophies and to look for more and we laid them out on the rough weedy lawn in front of the house. The stones were all elliptical and faintly humped and fairly uniform in size but varied immensely in colour. Some were purple spotted with dark blue, some tawny with creamy blotches, some a mottled lavender grey, many with swirling patterns round a central eye or strikingly decorated with stripes of purest white. As Julian said, it was very difficult to decide to leave any of them behind. It was like being in a huge art gallery and being told to help oneself. The most privileged stones she now took inside together with the sheep's skull and the bits of driftwood. The square piece of wood with the Chinese writing she propped upright like an icon upon the chimney piece of our little sitting-room, with the sheep's skull on one side of it and the gilt snuffbox on the other, and on the window ledges she arranged the stones among pieces of grey worked tree root, like small modern sculptures. I watched her total absorption in these tasks. We had tea.

After tea we drove over to the big church and walked about inside its bony emptiness. A few chairs upon the huge stone floor be tokened a tiny congregation. There was no stained glass, only huge oerpendicular windows through which the cool sun shone onto the rather powdery stone of the floor, casting a little shadow into 'iescats many centuries old. The church in the flat land -f ruined ship or ark, or perhaps like the skeleton of al, under whose gaunt ribs one moved with awe in silence with soft feet, padding and prowling,! ri s!

We drove back under a sky of light brown cloud streaked with long mouths full of green or orange light, and I felt exalted and hollow and clean and at the same time burning with desire and wondering, but with no will of my own, what was going to happen next. Julian prattled on and I gave her a short tutorial on English church architecture. Then she announced that she wanted to swim and we drove to the dunes and ran to the sea and it turned out that she had her bathing costume on underneath her dress and she rushed into the water and was soon splashing about and taunting me. (I cannot swim.) I think however that the sea was extremely cold for she came

out of it fairly quickly.

Meanwhile I sat upon the ridge of patterned stones above the water, holding the hem of her discarded dress and, until I noticed what I was doing and deliberately relaxed, crushing it up spasmodically in my hand. I did not think that Julian was deliberately postponing the moment of love-making or that she was doubting her gift of herself. Nor did I think that she wanted me to force her. I felt entirely given over to her instinct and to the tempo of her being. The moment I longed for and dreaded would come at its natural time, and its natural time would be tonight.

The absolute yearning of one human body for another particular one and its indifference to substitutes is one of life's major mysteries. There are, I am told, people who just want "a woman" or "a man." I cannot conceive of this state of affairs and it does not concern me. I had rarely wanted another human being absolutely which was the same as to say that I had rarely wanted another human being at all. Holding hands and kissing, that can mean something in friendship, though it had not been my way. But that trembling dedication to the totality of another I had experienced--well, as I sat on the divan bed that evening and waited for Julian I felt, never before: though I knew intellectually that I had been in love with Christian. And there had been another case, of which I do not tell the story here.

It was and was not like the first day of the honeymoon when the newly married pair, in tender deference to each other, feign habits which are not their own. I was not a young husband. I was not young and I was not a husband. I felt none of the youthful spouse's need to take control, his reflective anxiety about the future, his calmly classified commitment. I feared the future and I was committed but I felt myself that day in a world so entirely weird, in a land of marvels, where all that was required of my courage was that I should walk on and on. I felt no need to take control. It was not that Julian controlled me. We were both of us controlled by something else.

We had had eggs for lunch and sausages for supper. At supper we drank some of the wine. Julian had the healthy young person's indifference to alcohol. I thought I would be too excited to drink, but I downed two glasses with a sort of amazed appreciation. Julian had taken great pleasure in finding a pretty tablecloth and laying the table as elaborately as she could for both meals. Patara was, as advertised, well provided with all household necessities. Julian's dustpan and brush were otiose. (It also, as advertised, had its own electricity from a generator in the abandoned farmyard.) She had brought in flowers from the garden, straggling canterbury bells of a faded cottony blue, yellow loosestrife and wild lupins from beyond the fence, and one white peony streaked with crimson, as georgeous as a lotus. We sat

down formally and laughed with delight. After supper she said suddenly, "There's nothing to worry about."

"Uh-hu."

"You understand me?"

"Yes." We washed up. She went into the bathroom and I went into the bedroom and looked at myself in the mirror. I inspected my dulled straight hair and my thin discreetly wrinkled face. I looked amazingly young. I got undressed. Then she came and we were together for the first time.

When one has at last got what has been ardently longed for one wishes time to cease. Often indeed at such moments it is miraculously slowed. Looking into each other's eyes we caressed each other without any haste at all, with a sort of tender curious astonishment. I felt none of Marvell's frenzy now. I felt rather that I was privileged to be living out in a brief span some great aeon of the experience of love. Did the Greeks know between 600 and 400 b.c. what millennia of human experience they were enacting? Perhaps not. But I knew, as I worshipped my darling from head to foot that I was under orders, a sort of incarnate history of human love.

"Don't be silly, Bradley."

"I'm too old."

"Darling, we'll sleep."

"I'm going outside for a minute."

I went out naked into the dark garden where the light from the bedroom showed a dim square of jagged grass and dandelions. A mist was coming in from the sea, drifting slowly past the house, curling and uncurling like cigarette smoke. I listened and could not hear the waves, but a train rattled and then cried out like an owl somewhere in the land behind me.

When I came back she had put on a sort of dark blue silk nightshirt, unbuttoned to the navel. I pushed it back onto her shoulders. Her breasts were the perfect fruit of youth, rounded and just pendant. Her hair had dried into a soft golden fuzz. Her eyes were huge. I put on a dressing-gown. I knelt in front of her without touching her.

"My darling, don't worry."

"I'm not worrying," I said. "I'm just no bloody good."

"It will be all right."

"Julian, I'm old."

"Nonsense. I can see how old you are!"

"No, but--How bruised you are, your poor arm and your leg."

"I'm sorry--"

"It's beautiful, as if you'd been fingered by a god, stained with purple."

"Come into bed, Bradley."

"Your knees smell of the northern sea. Has anyone ever kissed the soles of your feet before?"

"No."

"Good. Sorry to be such a failure."

"You know there isn't any possible failure here, Bradley. I love you."

"I'm your slave."

"We will be married, won't we?"

"It's impossible."

"You needn't scream."

"Well, why do you say these sort of abstract things that you don't mean?"

"I'm just instinctively protecting myself."

"You haven't answered properly. You will marry me, won't you?"

"You're quite mad," I said, "but as I told you, I'm your slave. Whatever you go on wanting will be the law of my being."

"That's settled then. Oh dear, I am so tired."

We both were. After we had turned off the light she said, "And another thing, Bradley. Today has been the happiest day I have ever had in my whole life."

I was asleep two seconds later. We woke at dawn and embraced each other again, but with the same result.

The next day the mist was still there, thicker, still moving in from the sea with a sort of relentless marching motion, passing by the house in a steady purposive manner like a shadowy army bound for some distant hosting. We watched it, sitting laced together in the window seat of the little sitting-room in the early morning.

After breakfast we decided to walk inland and look for a shop. The air was chilly and Julian was wearing one of my jackets as an overcoat, since it had not occurred to her to purchase a coat during her shopping spree. We walked along a footpath beside a little stream full of watercress and then came to a signalman's cottage and crossed the railway and then went over a humpy bridge which was reflecting itself in a very quiet canal. The sun was piercing the mist now and rolling it up into great cloudy spheres of gold in the midst of which we walked as between huge balls which never quite touched us or touched each other. I felt very troubled about what had happened, or rather not happened, during the night, but I was also being made insanely happy by Julian's presence. To torment us I said, "We can't stay here forever, you know."

"Don't use that tone of voice. That's your 'despair.' Not again."

"No, just saying the obvious."

"I think we must stay here awhile to learn happiness."

"It's not my subject."

"You mean about our marriage?"

"Yes. Then later on I'll do my exams, everything will be--"Suppose I were much older than--"

"Oh stop worrying, Bradley. You want to sort of justify everything."

"I am by you eternally justified. Even if your love were to end now I am justified."

"Is that a quotation?"

"Only from me."

"Well, it isn't going to end now. And do stop boring me about your age."

"For all that beauty that doth cover thee is but the seemly raiment of my heart, which in thy breast doth live as thine in me. How can I then be older than thou art?"

"Is that a quotation?"

"It's a damn rotten argument."

"Bradley, have you noticed anything about me?"

"One or two little things, I suppose."

"Have you noticed that in the last two or three days I've grown up?"

I had noticed that. "Yes."

"I was a child and perhaps you are still thinking of me as a child. But now I am a woman, a real one."

"Oh my darling girl, hold onto me, hold onto me, hold onto me, and if I ever try to leave you don't let me."

We walked across a meadow to a little village and found our shop and as we began to walk back the mist cleared away completely. And now the dunes and our courtyard were huge and glistening with sun, all the stones, dampened a little by the mist, shining in their different colours. We left our basket beside the fence and ran on down towards the sea. Julian suggested that we should collect some wood for a fire, but this proved difficult because every bit of wood we found was far too beautiful to burn. However we did find a few pieces which she consented to immolate, and I was carrying them back through the sandy dunes to our collecting point, leaving her still on the beach, when I saw in the distance something which absolutely froze my blood. A man in uniform on a bicycle was just riding along the bumpy track away from our bungalow.

I called to Julian that I was going back to the house to get the car to carry the wood, and she should stay and go on collecting. I wanted to see if our bicyclist had left anything. I started off across the courtyard, but in a moment she was calling, "Wait for me!" and racing

after me and clasping my hand and laughing. I averted my terrified face from her and she noticed nothing.

When we got to the house she stopped in the garden to inspect some stones which she had placed there in a row. I moved without obvious haste to the porch and went in through the door. A telegram was lying on the mat and I picked it up with a quick swoop. I went on into the lavatory and locked the door.

The telegram was addressed to me. I began to fumble at it with trembling fingers. I tore the whole thing, including the telegram itself, then stood there holding the two halves of the paper together. It read, Please telephone me immediately Francis.

I stared at these deadly words. They could only mean something catastrophic. And the incomprehensibility of this visitation was terrifying. Francis did not know this address. Someone must have found out, how? Arnold presumably. We had made some slip, how, when, what, some fatal mistake. Even now Arnold was on his way here and Francis was trying to warn me.

Julian called, "Yoo hoo!"

I said, "Coming," and emerged. I had to get to the telephone at once and without letting Julian know.

"I think it's lunch time, don't you?" said Julian. "Let's fetch the wood after." She was putting the blue-and-white check tablecloth onto the table again. She put the jug of flowers in the centre of the table, from which it was always ceremonially removed as we sat down to eat. Already there were these customs.

"But we can go then on the way," said Julian.

"They may be shut this afternoon. And we may not want to go that way."

"I'll come with you, then."

"No, you stay here. Why don't you go and pick some of that watercress we saw? I'd love some for my lunch."

"Oh good, yes, I'll do that! I'll get a basket. Don't be long." She pranced off.

I went to the car, then failed to start it in my agitation. At last it started and I set off bumping horribly slowly along the track. By road the nearest village was where our big church was. There must be a telephone box there. The church was just outside the village on the side towards the sea, and I could recall nothing of the place from our night arrival. I passed the garage. I had thought of asking the garage man if I could use his telephone, but it might, not be private. I drove past the church and turning a corner saw the village street and a public telephone box.

I stopped outside it. Of course the box was occupied. Inside it a girl, gesticulating and smiling, turned her back on me. I waited. At

last the door opened. I found I had no change. Then the operator would not answer. Finally I achieved a reverse charge call to my own number and heard Francis, who had picked up the receiver at once, babbling at the other end.

"Francis, hello. How did you know where I was?"

"Oh Bradley--Bradley--"

"What's the matter? Has Arnold found out? What sort of a mess have you made of things?"

"Oh Bradley--"

"What is it, for God's sake? What's happened?"

There was silence, then a high whining sound. At the other end of the line Francis was crying. I felt sick with fear.

"What--?"

"Oh Bradley--it's Priscilla--" "What?"

"She's dead."

I became suddenly and strangely conscious of the telephone box, the sunshine, somebody waiting outside, my own staring-eyed face in the mirror.

"How--?"

"She killed herself--she took sleeping tablets--she must have had them hidden--I left her--I shouldn't have done--we took her to hospital--but it was too late--oh Bradley, Bradley--" "She is really--dead?" I said, and I felt that she simply couldn't be, it was impossible, she was in hospital where people were helped to get better, she simply could not have killed herself, it was another false alarm. "Really--dead? Are you sure--?"

"Yes, yes--oh I am so--it was all my fault--she's dead, Bradley--she was alive in the ambulance--but then they told me she wasn't alive any more--I--oh Bradley, forgive me--Priscilla wasn't alive any more. "It's not your fault," I said mechanically. "It's my fault."

"Oh I'm so wretched--it's all my fault--I want to kill myself--I can't live after this, how can I--" More whining and crying.

"Francis. Stop that whimpering. Listen. How did you find out where I was?"

"I found a letter in your desk from the agent--I thought you might be there--I had to find you--Oh Bradley, I've been in hell, in hell, not knowing where you were--thinking this had happened and you didn't even know--I sent the telegram late last night but they said it wouldn't arrive till this morning."

"I've just got it. Hold on. Just keep quiet and hold on." I stood silent in the slanting ray of the sun, looking at the pitted concrete of the telephone box, and I wanted to cry out, She cannot be dead, has everything been done, everything? I wanted to take Priscilla in my arms and make her live again. I wanted desperately to console her and

to make her happy. It would have been so easy.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God--" Francis was saying softly, repeating it again and again.

"Listen, Francis. Does anyone else know I'm here, does Arnold know?"

"No. No one knows. Arnold and Christian came over last night. They rang up and I had to tell them. But I hadn't found the letter then and I told them I didn't know where you were."

"That's good. Don't tell anybody where I am."

"But, Brad, you're coming back at once, aren't you? You must come back."

"I'm coming back," I said, "but not at once. It was only chance you found that letter. You must consider that this telephone conversation didn't happen."

"But, Brad, the funeral and--I haven't done anything--she's in the mortuary--"You haven't told her husband, you know, Roger Saxe?"

"No, I--"

"Well, let him know. You'll find his address and phone number in my address book in the--"Yes, yes--"He'll organize the funeral. If he won't, organize it yourself--Start organizing it anyway--Do whatever you'd do if you really didn't know where I was--I'll come when I can."

"Oh Brad, I can't do it--you must come, you must--they keep asking--she's your sister--"I hired you to look after her. Why did you leave her?"

"Oh God, oh God, oh God--"

"Do as I tell you. There's nothing we can do for--Priscilla--she isn't--there any more."

"Brad, please come, please--for my sake--Until I see you I'm in hell--I can't tell you what it's been like--I must see you, I must--"I can't come now," I said. "I can't--come--now. Get on with the arrangements--get hold of Roger Saxe--I leave it all to you. I'll come when I can. Goodbye."

I put the receiver down quickly and came out of the box into the full sun. The man who had been waiting looked at me curiously and went in. I walked over to the car and stood beside it, touching the bonnet. The dry road had made it dusty. I made trails in the dust with my fingers. I looked along the quiet pretty village street, composed of eighteenth-century houses of different shapes and sizes. Then I got into the car and turned it and began to drive back very slowly past the church and on towards Patara.

As I drove along the road at about fifteen miles an hour I realized what an ambiguous and suspended state I had been in since our arrival, so long ago, at Patara. I had of course been prepared to

occupy myself simply with being happy, simply with the miracle of her continued presence. This was right surely. These days of paradise, rescued from the slow anxious mastication of time, should not be marred by pusillanimous fears of the future, or by that despair which Julian called my "abstraction." On the other hand, as I now saw, some deep reflection had been at work, must have been at work, within that seemingly thoughtless joy-of-presence. I had, half hidden from myself, terrible purposes. My problem was simply how to keep Julian forever. And although I had said, to myself and to her, it is impossible, I knew at the same time that having once been with her in this way I could not now surrender her. The problem of keeping her had once, inconceivably long ago, seemed like the problem of persuading myself that it would, in spite of everything clearly to be said against this, be right to accept her generosity and take every possible advantage of it. But by now the problem had become, within the quiet self-concealed flow of my relentlessly purposive ratiocination, something much more blackly primitive, something which was scarcely problem or scarcely thought any more, but more like a sort of growth in my mind.

I had of course already decided not to tell Julian about Priscilla's death. If I told her I would have to go back to London at once. And I felt that if we left our refuge now, if we parted now, with our flight unconsummated, the process which would ensure our liberation from doubt and our eternal betrothal might never take place at all. It was something which, for both of us, I had to do, it was my destined ordeal to keep silent in order to bring us both through this darkness. And it must be done now in unbroken continuity with what had happened. The love-making was part of this. I could not and would not chill Julian's young blood now with this tale of suicide. Of course I would have to "discover" it soon, we would have to go back soon, but not yet, not without my having reached that point of decision which seemed so close and which would enable me and make me worthy to keep her forever. There was nothing I could do for Priscilla. My duty henceforth was to Julian. The sheer pain of the concealment was itself part of the ordeal. I wanted to tell Julian at once. I needed her consolation and her precious forgiveness. But for both our sakes I had for the moment to do without this.

"What ages you've been. I say, look at me and guess who!"

I came in through the porch and blinked in the comparative obscurity of the sitting-room. At first I could not see Julian at all, could only hear her voice coming to me out of darkness. Then I saw her face, the rest obscure. Then I saw what she had done.

She was dressed in black tights, black shoes, she wore a black velvet jerkin and a white shirt and a gold chain with a cross about her neck. She had posed herself in the doorway of the kitchen, holding the

sheep's skull up in one hand.

"I thought I'd surprise you! I bought them in Oxford Street with your money, the cross is a sort of hippie cross, I got it from one of those men, it cost fifty pence. All I needed was a skull, and then we found this lovely one. Don't you think it suits me? Alas, poor Yorick-- What's the matter, darling?"

"Nothing," I said.

"You're staring so. Don't I look princely? Bradley, you're frightening me. What is it?"

"Nothing."

"I'll take them off now. We'll have lunch. I got the watercress."

"We won't have lunch," I said. "We're going to bed."

"You mean now?"

"Yes."

I strode to her and took her wrist and pulled her into the bedroom and tumbled her on the bed. The sheep's skull fell to the floor. I put one knee on the bed and began to drag at her white shirt. "Wait, wait, you're tearing it!" She began hastily undoing the buttons and fumbling with the jerkin. I pulled the whole bundle up and over her head, but the chain and cross impeded them. "Wait, Bradley, please, the chain's got round my throat, please." I dug in the snowy whiteness of the shirt and the silky tangle of her hair for the chain and found it and snapped it. The clothes came away. Julian was desperately undoing her brassiere. I began hauling down the black tights dragging them over her thighs as she arched her body to help me. For a moment, still fully dressed, I surveyed her naked. Then I began to tear my clothes off.

"Oh Bradley, please, don't be so rough, please, Bradley, you're hurting me."

Later on, she was crying. There had been no doubt about this love-making. I lay exhausted and let her cry. Then I turned her round and let her tears mingle with the sweat which had darkened the thick grey hairs of my chest and made them cling to my hot flesh in flattened curls. I held her in a kind of horrified trance of triumph and felt between my hands the adorable racked sobbing of her body.

"Stop crying."

"I can't."

"I'm sorry I broke the chain. I'll mend it."

"It doesn't matter."

"I've frightened you."

"Yes."

"I love you. We'll be married."

"Yes."

"We will, won't we, Julian?"

"Yes."

"Do you forgive me?"

"Yes."

"Please stop crying."

"I can't."

Later on still we made love again. Then somehow it was the evening.

"What made you like that, Bradley?"

"The Prince of Denmark, I suppose."

We were exhausted and very hungry and I needed alcohol. We ate our lunch of liver sausage and bread and cheese and watercress without ceremony by lamplight with the windows open to the blue salty night. I drank up all the rest of the wine.

What had made me like that? Had I suddenly felt that Julian had killed Priscilla? No. The fury, the anger, was directed to myself through Julian. Or directed against fate through Julian and through myself. Yet of course this fury was love too, the power itself of the god, mad and alarming. "It was love," I said to her.

"Yes, yes."

I had removed, at any rate, my next obstacle, though the world beyond it looked different again, not what I had expected. I had prefigured the proximity of some simplifying intellectual certainty. What there was now was my relationship to Julian, stretching away still into the obscurity of the future, urgent and puzzling and historically dynamic, changing, it seemed, even from second to second. The girl looked different, I looked different. Was that the body which I had worshipped every part of? It was as if the terrible abstraction had been carried by the rush of divine power right into the centre of our passion. I found myself, at moments, trembling, and saw Julian trembling. And the touching thing was that we were comforting each other, like people who had just escaped from a fire.

"I will mend your chain, I will."

"There's no need to mend it, I can just knot it."

"And I'll mend the sheep's skull too."

"It's in too many pieces."

"I'll mend it."

"Let's draw the curtains. I feel bad spirits are looking in at us."

"We are surrounded by spirits. Curtains won't keep them out."

But I pulled the curtains and came round behind her chair, touching her neck very lightly with my finger. Her flesh was cool, almost cold, and she shuddered, arching her neck. She made no other response, but I felt that our bodies were rapt in a communion with each other which passed our understanding. Meanwhile it was a time for quiet

communication by words, for speech of a new sort, arcane prophetic speech.

"I know," she said. "Swarms of them. I've never felt like this before. Listen to the sea. It sounds so close. Though there's no wind."

We listened.

"Bradley, would you go and lock the front door?"

I went and locked it and then sat down again facing her. "Are you cold?"

"No, it's not--coldness."

"I know."

She was wearing the blue dress with the white willow-spray pattern which she had been wearing when she fled and a light woollen rug off our bed around her shoulders. She was staring at me with big eyes and every now and then a spasm passed across her face. There had been a lot of tears but none now. She looked so much, and beautifully, older, not the child I had known at all, but some wonderful holy woman, a prophetess, a temple prostitute. She had combed her hair down smoothly and pressed it back and her face had the nakedness, the solitude, the ambiguous staring eloquence of a mask. She had the dazed empty look of a great statue.

"Oh you wonderful, wonderful thing."

"I feel so odd," she said, "quite impersonal, I've never felt like this before at all."

"It is the power of love."

"Does love do that? I thought yesterday, the day before yesterday, that I loved you. It wasn't like this."

"It is the god, the black Eros. Don't be afraid."

"Oh I'm not--afraid--I just feel shattered and empty. I'm in a place where I've never been before."

"I'm there too."

"Yes. Yes."

"You even resemble me. I feel I'm looking into a mirror."

I had the strange feeling that I was speaking these words. I was speaking through her, through the pure echoing emptiness of her being, hollowed by love.

"Then I looked into your eyes and thought: Bradley! Now you have no name."

"We are possessed."

"I feel we are joined forever. Sort of--dedicated."

"Yes."

"Listen to that train, how clear it sounds."

We listened to it passing, far off.

"Is it like this in inspiration, I mean when you write?"

"Yes," I said. I knew it was, though I had never yet

experienced it, never yet. But now, empowered, I would be able to create. Though still in the dark, I had come through my ordeal.

"Is it the same thing really?"

"Yes," I said. "The desire of the human heart for love and for knowledge is infinite. But most people only realize this when they are in love, when the conception of this desire being actually fulfilled is present to them." And art too--"Is this desire--purified--in the presence of--its possibility--in the divine presence."

"Art and love--"Must both envisage eternal arrangements."

"You will write now, won't you?"

"I will write now."

"I feel complete," she said, "as if why we had to come together had been somehow explained. And yet the explanation doesn't matter. We are together. Oh Bradley, I'm yawning!"

"And my name's come back!" I said. "Come on. To bed and to sleep."

"I don't think I've ever felt so beautifully tired and heavy in my life."

I was deeply asleep. Some sound was crashing, crashing, crashing into the place where I was. I was a hidden Jew whom the Nazis had found at last. I heard them, like the soldiers in Uccello's picture, beating their halberds on the door and shouting. I stirred, found Julian still in my arms. It was dark.

"What is it?" Her frightened voice woke me into full consciousness and absolute dread.

Someone was banging and banging and banging on the front door.

"Oh who can it be?" She was sitting up. I felt her warm darkness beside me, seemed to see light reflected from her eyes.

"I don't know," I said, sitting up too and putting my arms round her. We clung together.

"Better keep quiet and not put the light on. Oh Bradley, I'm so frightened."

"I'll look after you." I was so frightened myself I could hardly think or speak.

"Sssh. Perhaps they'll go away."

The banging, which had stopped for a moment, was resumed louder than before. Some metal object was being pounded on the panels of the door. There was a sound of splintering wood.

I turned on a lamp and got up. As I did so I actually saw my bare legs trembling. I pulled on my dressing-gown. "Stay here. I'll see. Lock yourself in."

"No, no, I'm coming too--"Stay here."

"Don't open the door, Bradley, don't--I put the light on in the

little hall. The banging stopped at once. I stood in silence before the door, now knowing who was on the other side of it.

I opened the door very quietly and Arnold came, or rather almost fell, in through it.

I turned on the lights in the sitting-room and he followed me in there and put down on the table the large spanner with which he had been beating on the door. He sat down, not looking at me, breathing hard.

I sat down too, covering my bare knees which were shuddering convulsively.

"Is--Julian--here?" said Arnold, speaking thickly, as if in drunkenness, only he was certainly not drunk.

"Yes."

"I've come to--take her away--"She won't want to go," I said.
"How did you find us?"

"Francis told me. I asked him and asked him and asked him, and he told me. And about the telephone call."

"What telephone call?"

"Don't pretend," said Arnold, looking at me now. "He told me he telephoned you this morning about Priscilla."

"I see."

"So you couldn't--drag yourself away--from your love nest--even though your sister--had killed herself."

"I am going to London tomorrow. Julian is coming with me. We are going to be married."

"I want to see my daughter. The car is outside. I am going to take her back with me."

"No."

"Will you call her, please?"

I got up. As I passed by the table I picked up the spanner. I went to the bedroom. The door was closed, not locked, and I went in and locked the door after me.

Julian was dressed. She was wearing one of my jackets over her dress. It reached down to her thighs. She was very pale.

"Your pa."

"Yes. What's that?"

I threw the spanner down on the bed. "A lethal weapon. Not for use. Better come and see him."

"You will--"

"I'll protect you. There's nothing whatever to worry about. We'll just explain the situation to him and see him off. Come. No, wait a minute. I need some trousers." I rapidly put on a shirt and trousers. I saw with surprise that it was only just after midnight.

I went back to the sitting-room and Julian followed. Arnold

had got up. We faced him across the table, which was still strewn with the remnants of our supper which we had been too worn out to clear away. I put my arm round Julian's shoulder.

Arnold had got a grip on himself and had clearly resolved not to shout. He said, "My dear girl--"Hello."

"I've come to take you home."

"This is home," said Julian. I squeezed her, and then moved to sit down, leaving them facing each other.

Arnold in a light macintosh, with his exhausted denuded emotional face, looked like some sort of fanatical gunman. His pale, pale eyes stared and his lips were moving as if he were soundlessly stammering. "Oh Julian--come away--You can't stay here with this man--You must have lost your mind--Look, here's a letter from your mother begging you to come home--I'll put it here, please read it--How can you be so pitiless and callous, staying here and--I suppose you've been--after poor Priscilla--"What about Priscilla?" said Julian.

"So he hasn't told you?" said Arnold. He did not look at me. His teeth clicked together and there was a spasm in his face, perhaps the attempt to conceal a glare of triumph or pleasure.

"What about Priscilla?"

"Priscilla is dead," I said. "She killed herself yesterday with an overdose."

"He knew this morning," said Arnold. "Francis told him by telephone."

"That's correct," I said. "When I told you I was going to the garage I went to telephone Francis and he told me."

"And you didn't tell me? You hid it--and then we--all the afternoon we were--"Ach--" said Arnold.

Julian ignored him, staring at me and drawing my jacket closer about her, its collar turned up enclosing her tousled hair, her hands crossed at the neck. "Why?"

I rose. "It's hard to explain," I said, "but please try to understand. There was nothing more I could do for Priscilla. And for you--I had to stay--and bear the burden of being silent. It wasn't callousness."

"Lust might be its name," said Arnold.

Tears overflowed Julian's eyes and dropped down onto the lapels of my jacket. "Oh Bradley--how could you--how could we--oh poor, poor Priscilla--what a terrible thing--"He is irresponsible," said Arnold. "Or else he's a bit mad. He's totally callous. His sister dies and he won't leave his lovemaking."

"Oh Bradley--poor Priscilla--"

"Julian, I was going to tell you tomorrow. I was going to tell you everything tomorrow. I had to stay today. You saw how it was.

We were both possessed, we were held here, we couldn't have gone, it had to happen as it did."

"He's mad."

"Tomorrow we'll go back to ordinary things, tomorrow we'll think about Priscilla and I'll tell you all about it and how much I am to blame--"

"It was my fault," said Julian, "it was because of me. Otherwise you would have been with her."

"One can't stop people from killing themselves if they're determined to. It may even be wrong to do so. Her life had become very sad."

"A convenient justification," said Arnold. "So you think Priscilla is better off dead, do you?"

"No. I'm just saying it--at least could be thought about like that--I don't want Julian to feel that--Oh Julian, I ought to have told you."

"Yes--It's--I feel a sort of doom on us--Oh Bradley, why didn't you say--?"

"Sometimes one has to be silent even if it hurts awfully. I wanted your consolation, of course I did. But something else was more important."

"The sexual gratification of an elderly man," said Arnold. "Think, Julian, think. He is thirty-eight years older than you are."

"No, he isn't," said Julian. "He's forty-six, and that's--Arnold gave a sort of laugh and there was the same spasm in his face. "He told you that, did he? He's fifty-eight. Ask him."

"He can't be--"Look him up in Who's Who."

"I'm not in Who's Who."

"Bradley, how old are you?"

"Fifty-eight."

"When you are thirty he will be nearly seventy," said Arnold. "Come on. Surely this is enough. We've kept this quiet and there's no need for shouting. I see Bradley even removed the blunt instrument. Let's go, Julian. You can have your cry in the car. Then you'll start feeling what an escape you've had. Come. He won't try to stop you now. Look at him."

Julian was looking at me. I covered my face.

"Bradley, take your hands away. Please. Are you really fifty-eight?"

"Yes."

"Can't you see he is? Can't you see he is?"

She murmured, "Yes--now--"

"Does it matter?" I said. "You said you didn't mind what age I was."

"Oh don't be pathetic," said Arnold. "Let's all keep our dignity. Come, Julian, please. Bradley, don't think I'm being unkind. I'm doing what any father would do."

"Quite," I said, "quite."

Julian said, "I can't bear it, about Priscilla, I can't bear it, I can't bear it--"Steady," said Arnold. "Steady. Come now."

I said, "Julian, don't go. You can't just go like that. I want to explain things to you properly and alone. Al. 1 right, if you now feel differently about me, that's that. I'll drive you anywhere you want and we'll say good-bye. But I beg you not to leave me now. I ask you in the name of--in the name of--"I forbid you to stay," said Arnold. "I regard this relationship as a defilement. I'm sorry to use such strong language. I have been very upset and very angry and I am trying hard to be reasonable and to be kind. Do just see this thing objectively. I cannot and I will not go away without you."

"I want to explain to you," I said. "I want to explain about Priscilla."

"How can you--?" she said. "Oh dear--oh dear--" She was crying now helplessly, with trembling wet lips.

I felt agony, physical pain, total terror. "Don't leave me, my darling, I should die." I went to her and reached out towards her, touching the sleeve of my jacket timidly.

"Julian, I can't let you go now, I'd go mad please don't go--you must stay with me long enough to let me defend myself--"You are indefensible," said Arnold. "Why argue? Can't you see it's over? You have had a caper with a silly girl and now it's over. The spell is broken. And give me that spanner. I don't like to see you holding it."

I gave him the spanner, but I did not move from the door. I said, "Julian, decide."

Julian, making an effort with her tears, pulled herself quickly but firmly away from her father's grip. "I'm not going with you. I'm going to stay here with Bradley."

"Oh thank God," I said, "thank God."

"I want to hear what Bradley has to say. I'll come back to London tomorrow. But I'm not going to leave Bradley alone in the middle of the night."

"Thank God."

"You're coming with me," said Arnold.

"No, she isn't. She's said what she wants to do. Now please go away. Arnold, think. Do you want us to fight about this? Do you want to crack my head with that spanner? I promise I'll bring Julian to London tomorrow. Nobody shall force her, nobody can force her, she'll do what she wants to do, I'm not trying to kidnap her."

"Please go," she said. "I'm sorry. You've been kind and--quiet,

but I must just stay here tonight. I promise I'll come to you and listen to everything you want to say. But please be merciful and leave me now to talk to him. We've got to talk, do understand. You can't really do or undo anything here."

"She's right," I said.

Arnold did not look at me. He looked at his daughter with a very concentrated desolate stare. He gave a sort of gasping sigh. "Do you promise to come home tomorrow?"

"I'll come and see you tomorrow."

"Do you promise to come home?"

"Yes."

She suffered this embrace for a moment, then gently freed herself and went into the bedroom and sat down on the bed. I followed and tried to put my arms round her, but she thrust me away with little gentle half-unconscious gestures.

"Oh Julian, we haven't lost each other, have we? I am so deeply sorry I lied about my age, it was stupid. But it doesn't really matter, does it? I mean, we're beyond where it matters, it can't matter. And I couldn't go back to London this morning. I know it was a crime not to. But it was a crime that I committed because I love you."

"I feel so confused," she said, "I feel so awfully confused--"Let me explain how--"Please. I can't hear, I just wouldn't be able to hear--Everything's been such a shock--like a--destruction--I'd rather--I think I'll just go to the lavatory and then I'll try to go to sleep." She went away, returned, and took off her dress and put on her dark blue silk night-shirt over her underclothes. She seemed already like a sleepwalker.

"Julian, thank you for staying. I worship you with gratitude for having stayed. Julian, you will be kind to me, won't you. You could break my neck with your little finger."

She begun to get heavily into the bed, moving stiffly, like an old person.

"That's right," I said. "We'll talk in the morning, won't we. We'll sleep now. If we can just go to sleep in each other's arms we'll be so much helped, won't we."

She looked up at me sombrely, the tears dry on her face.

"May I stay, Julian?"

"Bradley--darling--I'd rather be by myself just now. I feel as if I'd been invaded or--broken--I've got to become complete again and for that--it's better to be alone--just now."

"Yes, yes."

"Good night, my darling."

I kissed her on the brow and then quickly got up and turned the light out and closed the door. Then I went and locked and bolted

the front door. Everything seemed possible tonight, even the return of Arnold with the spanner. I sat in an armchair in the sitting-room and wished I had brought some whisky with me. I resolved to stay awake for the rest of the night.

I felt so hurt and frightened that it was very hard to think at all. I felt like simply doubling up over my pain and groaning. What did it look like to her, what would it do to her, my being so exposed and humiliated by her father? Arnold did not need to beat me to my knees with a blunt instrument. He had quite sufficiently defeated me. What did that failure about Priscilla mean? Oh if only I had been given the time to tell her all myself. Would Julian suddenly see me quite differently? Would I look to her like an old man crazed with lust? I must explain that it was not just because I wanted to go to bed that I concealed Priscilla's suicide, that I abandoned Priscilla, that I left her, alive and dead, to others. It was because these things were greater than themselves, because there was a sort of dedication, a sort of visitation, something else to which I had to be absolutely faithful. Would this seem nonsense to her now? Would, and this I am afraid was the most tormenting thought of all, the difference between forty-six and fifty-eight prove to be fatal?

Later on I started thinking about Priscilla and the sheer sadness of it all and the pitifulness of her end. The shocking fact of her death seemed only now to be reaching my heart, and I felt futile ingenious love for her. I ought to have thought about how to console her. It would not have been impossible. I began to feel sleepy and got up and prowled around. I opened the bedroom door and listened to Julian's steady breathing and prayed. I went into the bathroom and looked at my face in the mirror. The godly radiance had withdrawn from my face. My eyes were hooded by wrinkles, my brow was scored, little blood-red worms crawled in the dull sallow skin, I looked gaunt and old. But Julian was sleeping quietly and all my hope slept with her. I returned to my sitting-room armchair and put my head back and instantly fell asleep. I dreamed that Priscilla and I were young again, hiding under the counter in the shop.

I awoke to a grey awful spotty early-morning light which made the unfamiliar room present in a ghastly way. The furniture was humped shapelessly about me like sleeping animals. Everything seemed to be covered with soiled dust sheets. The slits in the clumsily drawn curtains revealed a dawn sky, pale and murky, without colour, the sun not yet risen.

I experienced horror, then memory. I began to get up, felt painfully stiff, and smelt some vile odour, probably the odour of myself. I swung myself to the door, heaving a stiff leg, hanging onto the backs of chairs. I listened at the door of the bedroom. Silence. I

very cautiously opened the door and put my head round it.

It was hard to see in the room: the granular dawn light, with the texture of a bad newspaper picture, seemed to obscure rather than promote vision. The bed was in some sort of chaos. I thought I could discern Julian. Then I saw that there were only tossed sheets. The bed, the room, was empty.

I called her name softly, ran into the other rooms. I even looked crazily into cupboards. She was not in the house. I went outside onto the porch and ran all round the house and then out onto the level of the stony courtyard, and down to the dunes, calling her name, shouting now, yelling as loudly as I could. I came back and hooted the horn of the car again and again, making a ghastly tocsin in the empty absolutely quiet twilit scene. But nothing answered. There was no doubt about it. She had gone.

I went back into the house, turning on all the lights, a doom-stricken illumination in the gathering day and searched the place once again. On the dressing table was a pile of five-pound notes, the change from the money I had given her to buy clothes, which I had insisted she should keep in her handbag. The handbag, her new one, which she had bought in the "shopping spree," had gone. All her new clothes were still hanging in the wardrobe. There was no letter, no communication for me, nothing. She had disappeared into the night with her handbag, in her blue willow-pattern dress, without a coat, without a word, creeping out of the house while I slept.

I got to the road and doubled back towards the railway station. At the little toy station the platforms were empty. A railway man walking along the tracks told me that no train had stopped there during the night hours. I drove on to the main road and along it in the direction of London. The sun was shining coldly and brightly and a few cars were already about. But the grassy verges of the road were empty. I turned back and drove the other way, through the village, past the church. I even stopped and went into the church. Of course it was hopeless. I drove back and ran into the cottage with a desperate feigned hope that she might have returned while I was away. The little place with its open door and its ransacked air and all its lights on stood obscenely void in the bright sunshine. Then I drove the car to the dunes, running its bonnet into a dewy wall of wispy wiry grass and sand. I ran about among the dunes and down onto the beach, shouting, "Julian! Julian!" The climbing sun shone onto a quiet sea which without even a ripple drew its level line along the gently shelving wall of many-coloured elliptical stones. w,, ait, Brad, better let Roger go first."

Christian was holding my arm in a firm grip.

With his face stiff and his false soldier's tread Roger marched

self-consciously out of his pew and back towards the door of the chapel. The brocaded curtains had closed upon Priscilla's coffin, now bound for the furnace, and the unspeakable service was over.

"What do we do now, go home?"

"No, we should walk around a bit in the garden, I think it's customary, at least it is in the U. S. A. I'll just say a word to those women."

"Who are they?"

"I don't know. Friends of Priscilla's. I think one of them's her char. Kind of them to come, wasn't it?"

"Yes, very."

"You must talk to Roger."

"I have nothing to say to Roger."

We walked slowly down the aisle. Francis, fluttering by the doorway, stood aside to let the women pass, sent a ghastly smile in our direction, then followed them out.

"Brad, who was that poetry by that the man read?"

"Browning. Tennyson."

"It was lovely, wasn't it? So suitable. It made me cry."

Roger had arranged the cremation and had devised a terrible set of poetry readings. There had been no religious service.

We emerged into the garden. A light rain was falling from a brightish brownish sky. The good weather seemed to be over. I shook Christian's hand off my arm and put up my umbrella.

Roger, looking responsible and manly and bereaved in smart black, was thanking the poetry-reader and another crematorium official. The coffin-bearers had already gone. Christian was talking to the three women and they were affecting to admire the dripping azaleas. Francis, beside me, was trying to get in under my umbrella, and was repeating a story which he had already told me, with variations, several times. He was whimpering a little as he spoke. He had wept audibly during the service.

"Oh Brad, forgive me."

"Stop whingeing like a bloody woman. Go away, will you? It wasn't your fault. It had to happen. It was better like that. You can't save someone who wants death. It was better so."

"You told me to look after her, and I--"Go away."

"Where can I go to, oh where can I go to at all? Brad, don't drive me away, I'll go mad, I've got to be with you, otherwise I'll go mad with misery, you've got to forgive me, you've got to help me, Brad, you've got to. I'm going back to the flat now and I'll tidy it up and I'll clear it all, I will, oh please let me stay with you now, I can be useful to you, you needn't give me any money--I don't want you in the flat. Just clear off, will you."

"I'll kill myself, I will."

"Get on with it, then."

"You do forgive me, don't you, Brad?"

"Yes, of course. Just leave me alone. Please." I jerked the umbrella away, turning my shoulder against Francis, and made for the gate.

Flip-flopping rainy steps caught up with me. Christian. "Brad, you must talk to Roger. He says would you wait for him. He has some business to talk with you. Oh Brad, don't run off in that awful way. I'm coming with you, anyway, don't run off. Do come back and talk to Roger, please." o 'r "He should be content with having killed my sister without bothering me with his business."

"Well, wait a moment, wait, wait, look, here he comes."

I waited under the arty lich-gate while Roger advanced under his umbrella. He even had a black macintosh.

"Bradley. A sad business. I feel much to blame."

I looked at him, then turned away.

"As Priscilla's heir--I paused.

His umbrella touched mine and I took a pace back. I could see Christian's live eager face just beyond, watching, with the avid curiosity of the unhurt. She had no umbrella and was wearing a dark green raincoat and a smart black macintosh hat with a wide brim, like a small sombrero. Francis had gone back to the azalea ladies.

I said nothing to Roger, just looked at him.

"The will is very simple, there should be no problem. I'll let you see a copy of course. And perhaps you wouldn't mind returning to me any things of Priscilla's which you have, those jewels for instance, they could be sent by registered post. Or better still, perhaps I could call for them this afternoon at the flat, if you're going to be in? Mrs. Evandale has very kindly said I may call for the things Priscilla left at her house--I turned my back on him and walked away down the street.

He called after me, "I'm very upset too, very--but what's the use Christian was walking beside me, having got in underneath the umbrella, taking my arm again. We passed a small yellow Austin which was parked at a meter. Inside at the wheel sat Marigold. She bowed to me as we passed, but I ignored her.

"Who's that?" said Christian.

"Roger's mistress."

A little later the Austin passed us by. Marigold was driving with one arm thrown round Roger's back. Roger's head lay on her shoulder. No doubt he really was very upset, very.

"Brad, don't walk so fast. Don't you want me to help you? Don't you want me to find out where Julian is?"

"No."

"But do you know where she is?"

"No. Could you take your hand off my arm, please?"

"All right--but you must let me help you, you can't just go off by yourself after all these horrors. Please come and stay at Notting Hill. I'll look after you, I'd love to. Will you come?"

"No, thank you."

"No."

"But where is she, Brad, where can she be, where do you think she is? You don't think she's killed herself, do you?"

"No, of course not," I said. "She's with Arnold."

"Could be. I haven't seen Arnold since--"He came and took her away in the night against her will. He's got her cooped up somewhere, lecturing her. She'll soon give him the slip and come back to me, like she did before. That's all there is to it."

"We-ell--" Christian peered up at me, peeking from under her black sombrero. "How do you feel, Brad, generally in yourself? You know, you need looking after, you need--"Just leave me alone, will you. And keep Francis at Notting Hill. I don't want to see him. And now, if you'll excuse me, I'll take this taxi. Goodbye."

It was perfectly simple of course, what had happened. I saw it all now. Arnold must have come back while I was asleep and either cajoled or forced Julian to get into the car with him. Perhaps he had asked her to sit in the car to talk to him. Then he had driven off quickly. She must have wanted to hurl herself from that car. But she had promised me not to. Besides, she wanted no doubt to convince her father. Now they were somewhere together, arguing, fighting. Perhaps he had locked her into a room somewhere. But she would soon escape and come back to me. I knew that she could not simply have left me like that without a word.

I had been to Ealing of course. When I had driven back to London I went to my flat first in case there was a message, then on to Ealing. I parked the car opposite the house and went and rang the bell. No one came. I went and sat in the car and watched the house. Then after about an hour I started walking up and down on the opposite pavement. I could now see Rachel who was watching me from the upstairs landing window. After a bit more of this she opened the window and shouted, "She isn't here!" and closed the window again. I drove away and returned the car to the car-hire firm and went back to my flat. I decided now to remain on duty at the flat since that was where Julian would come to when she escaped. I had only emerged to attend Priscilla's funeral.

The world is perhaps ultimately to be defined as a place of

suffering. Man is a suffering animal, subject to ceaseless anxiety and pain and fear, subject to the rule of what the Buddhists call dukha, the endless unsatisfied anguish of a being who passionately desires only illusory goods. However within this vale of misery there are many regions. We all suffer, but we suffer so appallingly differently. An enlightened one may, who knows, pity the fretful millionaire with as pure an energy as he pities the starving peasant. Possibly the lot of the millionaire is more genuinely pitiable, since he is deluded by the solace of false and fleeting pleasures, while there may be a compulsory wisdom contained in the destitution of the peasant. Such judgments however are reserved for the enlightened, and ordinary mortals who feigned to utter them would rightly be called frivolous. We properly think it a worse fate to starve in poverty than to yawn in the midst of luxury. If the suffering of the world were, as it could be imagined to be, less extreme, if boredom and simple worldly disappointments were our gravest trials, and if, which is harder to conceive, we grieved little at any bereavement and went to death as to sleep, our whole morality might be immensely, perhaps totally, different. That this world is a place of horror must affect every serious artist and thinker, darkening his reflection, ruining his system, sometimes actually driving him mad. Any seriousness avoids this fact at its peril, and the great ones who have seemed to neglect it have only done so in appearance. (This is a tautology.) This is the planet where cancer reigns, where people regularly and automatically and almost without comment die like flies from floods and famine and disease, where people fight each other with hideous weapons to whose effects even nightmares cannot do justice, where men terrify and torture each other and spend whole lifetimes telling lies out of fear. This is where we live.

This preludes, dear friend, my apologia, offered to you not for the first time, concerning this love story. The pains of love? Pooh! And yet: the ecstasy of love, the glory of love. Plato lay with a beautiful boy and thought it no shame to see here the beginning of the path to the sun. Happy love undoes the self and makes the world visible. Unhappy love is, or can be, a revelation of pure suffering. Too often of course our reverses are clouded and embittered by jealousy, remorse, hatred, the mean and servile "if onlys" of a peevish spirit. But there can be intuitions even here of a more sublime agony. And who can say that this is not in some way a fellow feeling with those quite otherwise afflicted? Zeus, they say, mocks lovers' oaths, and we may covertly smile even while we sympathize with the lovelorn, especially if they are young. We believe they will recover. Perhaps they will, whatever recovery may be. But there are times of suffering which remain in our lives like black absolutes and are not blotted out.

Fortunate are those for whom these black stars shed some sort of light.

I thought this afterwards, lying upon my bed, while Francis padded softly around the house inventing tasks for himself. I lay on my bed with the curtains half pulled and gazed at the chimney piece and at the buffalo lady and at A Friend's Gift. I also felt a violent rage against Arnold, which was a kind of jealousy, a vile emotion. At least he was her father and had an indestructible connection with her. I had nothing. Did I really believe, I was asked later, that on that awful night Arnold had really come back and taken Julian away? I cannot answer this clearly. My state of mind, which I shall in a moment attempt to describe, is not easily conveyed. I felt that if I could not build a pattern of at least plausible beliefs to make some just bearable sense out of what had happened I should die. Though I suppose what I was conceiving was not true death, but a torture to which death would be preferable. How could I live with the idea that she had simply left me in the night without a word? It could not be. I knew there was an explanation. Did I desire her during this time? The question is frivolous.

In waiting time devours itself. Great hollows open up inside each minute, each second. Each moment is one at which the longed-for thing could happen. Yet at the same instant the terrified mind has flown ahead through centuries of unlightened despair. I tried to grasp and to arrest these giddy convulsions of the spirit, lying on my back on my bed and watching the window glow from dark to light and fade again from light to dark. Odd that a demonic suffering should lie supine, while a glorified suffering lies prone.

I shall now advance the narrative by quoting several letters.

I know that you will communicate with me as soon as you are able to. I will not leave the flat for a single moment. I am a corpse awaiting its Saviour. Accident and its own force induced the revelation of a passion which duty might have concealed. Once revealed, your miraculous self-giving increased it a thousandfold. I am yours forever. And I know that you love me and I absolutely trust your love. We cannot be defeated. You will come to me soon, my darling and my queen. Meanwhile, oh my dear, I am in so much pain.

B.

Dear Christian,

have you now any idea where Julian is? Has Arnold taken her away somewhere? He must be keeping her hidden by force. If you can discover anything at all, however vague, let me know for God's sake B.

Please reply at once by telephone or letter. I do not want to see you.

Dear Arnold,

I am not surprised that you are afraid to face me again. I do not know how you persuaded or forced Julian to go away with you, but do not believe that any arguments of yours can keep us apart.

Julian and I have talked with full knowledge and understand each other. After your first departure all was well between us. Your "revelations" made and can make no difference. You are dealing with a kind of mutual attachment which, since you make no mention of it in your books, I assume that you know nothing of. Julian and I recognize the same god. We have found each other, we love each other, and there is no impediment to our marriage. Do not imagine that you can constitute one. You have seen that Julian was unwilling even to listen to you. Please now recognize that your daughter is grown-up and has made her choice. Accept, as indeed you finally must, her free decision in my favour. Naturally she cares what you think. Naturally too she will not finally obey you. I expect her return hourly. By the time you get this she may even be with me.

Your objection to me as a suitor has of course deep motives. The matter of my age, though important, is certainly not crucial. You have even admitted to me that as a writer you are a disappointed man. And some part of you has always envied me because I have kept my gift pure and you have not. Continual mediocre creation can sour a whole life. The compromise with the second best, which is the lot of almost every man, is by the bad artist externalized into a persisting testimony. How much better the silence and guarded speech of a more strict endeavour. That I should also have gained your daughter's love must seem, I can well understand, like the last straw.

I am sorry that our friendship, or whatever name one may give to the obsessive relationship which has bound us together for so many years, should end in this way. This is not the place to utter its elegy. If I feel vindictive towards you now, it is simply because you are an obstacle in the way of something infinitely more important than any "friendship." Doubtless it is wise of you to keep out of my way. And if you visit me again, do not bring a blunt instrument with you. I do not care for threats and hints of violence. I have, I assure you, quite enough violence inside myself ready to be provoked.

Julian and I will settle our future together privately and in our own way. We understand each other perfectly. Please accept this fact and cease your cruel and vain attempts to force your daughter to do what she does not want to do.

B.P.

Dearest Old Brad,

Brad (this is the most important part of this letter), I want to say this to you. I wish in a way I hadn't met Arnold so pat on coining back. I like him and I feel sort of curious about him and he amuses me. (And I like to be amused.) But he's a red herring, I guess. I came back for you. (Did you know that?) And I'm still here for you. I go for you in a deep way, I never really gave you up, you know. And in a deep way you're even far more amusing than Arnold. So why not let's get together? If you need consoling, I'll console you. As I told you before, I'm a damned attractive clever rich widow. A lot of people are after me. So what about it, Brad? That little old till-death-do-us-part bit did mean something, you know. I'll ring again tomorrow.

Caring for you, Brad old thing, with much love, The passage above about "waiting" may have suggested that weeks had now passed. In fact four days, which seemed like four years, had passed.

Men who live by words and writing can, as I have already observed, attach an almost magical efficacy to a communication in that medium. The letter to Julian I wrote out three times, sending one copy to Baling, one to her Training College and one to her school. I could scarcely believe that any would reach her, but it was a relief to pain to write the letters and to drop them in the box.

On the day after the funeral Hartbourne rang up to explain in detail why he had been unable to attend. I forgot to say that he had earlier dictated to Francis by telephone a carefully worded message of condolence about Priscilla's death! My doctor also rang to say that my usual brand of sleeping pill was now on the forbidden list.

On the third evening Rachel turned up. Of course whenever the doorbell rang I rushed out sick with hope and terror. Twice it was Christian (whom I did not let in), once Rigby asking for Francis. (Francis went out and they talked for some time in the court.) The fourth time it was Rachel. I saw her through the glass and opened the door.

Seeing Rachel there in the flat was like a bad trip in a time machine. There was a memory-odour like a smell of decay. I felt distressed, physically repelled, frightened. Her wide round pale face was terribly familiar, but with the ambiguous veiled familiarity of a dream. It was as if my mother had visited me in her cerements.

She came in tossing her head with a surge of excitement, a perhaps feigned air of confidence, almost of elation. She strode by me, not looking at me, her hands deep in the pockets of her tweed coat which had been cobwebbed-over by the light rain. She was purposeful and handsome and I flinched out of her way. She took off her woollen

hat and her coat and shook them lightly and hung them up in the hall. We sat down in the sitting-room in the cold brown early-evening light.

Rachel smoothed her skirt down neatly about her knees. "Bradley, I wanted to tell you how sorry I was about Priscilla."

"Where's Julian?"

"Don't you know?"

"I know she'll come back. I don't know where she is."

"Poor old Bradley," said Rachel. She gave a nervous ejaculatory laugh like a cough.

"Where is she?"

"She's on holiday. I don't know where she is just now, I really don't. Here's the letter you sent her. I haven't read it."

I took the letter. The return of a passionate letter unread desolates far regions of the imagination. If somewhere she had read my words the world was changed. Now all blew back upon me like dead leaves.

"Oh Rachel, where is she?"

"Honestly I don't know, I'm not in touch. Bradley, do stop it. Think of your dignity or something. You look terrible, you look a hundred. You might shave at least. This thing is all in your mind."

"You didn't think so when Julian said she loved me."

"Rachel," I said, "you are talking about someone else. You are not talking about Julian, about my Julian."

"Your Julian is a fiction. This is what I'm telling you, dear Bradley. I'm not saying she didn't care for you, but a young girl's emotions are chaos."

"And you are talking to another person. You obviously have no conception of what you're dealing with. I live in a different world, I am in love, and--"Do you think there is some magic in those words which you utter so solemnly?"

"Yes, I do. All this is happening on a different plane--"This is a form of insanity, Bradley. Only the insane think that there are planes which are quite separate from other planes. It's all a muddle, Bradley, it's all a muddle. God knows, I'm saying this to you in kindness."

"Love is a sort of certainty, perhaps the only sort."

"It's just a state of mind--"It's a true state of mind."

"Oh Bradley, do stop. You've had a terrible time lately, no wonder your head's in a whirl. I am so awfully sorry about Priscilla."

"Priscilla. Yes."

"You mustn't blame yourself too much."

"No--"

"Where did Francis find her? Where was she lying when he found her?"

"I don't know."

"You mean you didn't ask?"

"No. I suppose she was in bed."

"I would have wanted to know--all the details--I think--just to picture it--Did you see her dead?"

"No."

"Didn't you have to identify her?"

"No."

"Someone must have done."

"Roger did."

"Odd about identifying dead people, recognizing them. I hope I don't ever have to--"He's keeping her prisoner somewhere, I know he is."

"Really, Bradley, you seem to be living in some sort of literary dream. Everything is so much duller and more mixed-up than you imagine, even the awful things are."

"He locked her in her room before."

"Of course he didn't. The girl was romancing."

"Do you really not know where she is?"

"Really."

"Why hasn't she written to me?"

"She's no good at writing letters, never has been. Anyway give her time. She will write. Perhaps it's just a rather difficult letter to compose!"

"Rachel, you don't know what's inside me, you don't know what it's like to be me, to be where I am. You see it's a matter of absolute certainty, of knowing your own mind and somebody else's with absolute certainty. It's something completely steady and old, as if it's always been, ever since the world began. That's why what you say is simply nonsense, it doesn't make any sense to me, it's a sort of gabbling. She understands, she spoke this language with me at once. We love each other."

"Bradley dear, do try to come back to reality--"This is reality. Oh God, supposing she were dead--"Oh don't be silly. You make me sick."

"Rachel, she isn't dead, is she?"

In a way, the truth was that I did not. I could attach no precise events to the idea of Rachel. Her memory was simply a cold cloud to be shuddered at. She was a familiar person and a familiar presence, but the notion that I had ever done anything in relation to her was utterly shadowy, so much had the advent of Julian drained the rest of my life of significant content, separating history from prehistory. I wanted to explain this.

"Yes, I do--of course--remember--but it's as if--since Julian--everything has been--sort of amputated and--the past has quite gone--

it didn't mean anything anyway--it was just--I'm sorry this sounds rather unkind, but being in love one simply has to tell the truth all the time--I know you must feel that there was a sort of--betrayal--you must resent it--"Resent it? Good heavens no. I just feel sorry for you. And it's all a pity and a sort of waste and rather pathetic really. Well, a sad thing, a disappointment perhaps, a disillusionment. It seems odd to me now that I ever felt that you were a sort of strong wise man or that you could help me. I was touched when you talked about eternal friendship. It seemed to mean something at the time. Do you remember talking about eternal friendship?"

"No."

"Can you really not remember? You are peculiar. I wonder if you're having some sort of breakdown? Can you really not recall our liaison at all?"

"There was no liaison."

"Oh come, come. I agree it was brief and stupid and I suppose rather improbable. No wonder Julian could hardly believe it."

"You told Julian?"

"Yes. Hadn't you thought that I might? Oh but of course you'd forgotten all about it!"

"You told--?"

"And I'm afraid I told Arnold almost straightaway. You're not the only one who has states of mind. With my husband at any rate, I'm not very discreet. It's a risk one runs with married people."

"When did you tell her--when--?"

"Oh, not till later. When Arnold came down to your love-nest he brought Julian a letter from me. And in that letter I told her."

"What did you tell her?"

"And when she did get back, I must say--"What did you tell her?"

"Simply what happened. That you appeared to be in love with me, that you started kissing me passionately, that we went to bed together and it wasn't a great success but you swore eternal devotion and so on, and then Arnold came and you ran out without your socks on and bought Julian that pair of boots--"Oh God--you told her--all that--"Well, why not? It did happen, didn't it? You don't deny it, do you? It was relevant, wasn't it? It was part of you. It would have been wrong to conceal it."

"Oh God--"

"No wonder you tried to forget it all. But, Bradley, one is responsible for one's actions, and one's past does belong to one. You can't blot it out by entering a dream world and decreeing that life began yesterday. You can't make yourself into a new person overnight, however much in love you feel you are. That sort of love is an illusion,

all that 'certainty' you were talking about is an illusion. It's like being under the influence of drugs."

"No, no, no."

"Anyway it's over now and no harm done. You needn't worry too much or feel remorse or anything, she had already decided it was a mistake. She has some sense. Really, you mustn't take a young girl's feelings so literally. You haven't lost a pearl of great price, my dear Bradley, and you'll appreciate this sooner than you imagine. You'll soon be heaving a sigh of relief too. Julian is a very ordinary little girl. She's immature, not all there yet, like an embryo. Of course there was a lot of emotion swilling around, but it didn't really signify too much who was at the receiving end of it. It's a very volatile time of life. There's nothing steady or permanent or deep in any of these great crazes. She's been 'madly in love' any number of times in the last two or three years. My dear man, did you really imagine you would be the sticking point of a young girl's passion? How could that be? A girl like Julian will have to love a hundred men before she finds the right one. I was just the same. Oh do wake up, Bradley. Look at yourself in a mirror. Come back to earth."

"And she came straight to you?"

"I suppose so. She arrived pretty soon after Arnold--'

"And what did she say?"

"Do stop looking like King Lear "What did she say?"

"What could she say? What could anyone say? She was crying like a maniac anyway and--"

"Oh Christ, oh Christ."

"She got me to repeat it all and give all the details and swear it was true and then she believed me."

"But what did she say? Can't you remember anything, she actually said?"

"She said, 'If only it had been longer ago.' I suppose she had a point there."

"She didn't understand. It wasn't at all like what you said. When you said that, it wasn't true. When you used those words they conveyed something which simply wasn't true. You implied--"I'm sorry! I don't know what words you would expect me to have used! Those ones seemed to me to be pretty appropriate and accurate."

"She can't have understood "I think she did understand, Bradley. I'm sorry, but I think she did."

"You said she was crying."

"Oh madly, like a child who was going to be hanged. But she always did enjoy crying."

"How could you have told her, how could you--But she must have known it wasn't like that, it wasn't like that--"Well, I think it was

like that!"

"How could you have told her?"

"It was Arnold's idea. But I didn't honestly feel at that point that I had to be discreet any more. I thought a little shock would bring Julian to her senses--"

"Why have you come here today? Did Arnold send you?"

"No, not particularly. I felt you ought to be told about Julian."

"But you haven't told me!"

"About it being--well, you must have assumed it anyway--all over."

'We."

"Don't shout. And I came, you won't care of course, but out of a sort of kindness. I wondered if I could help you."

I stared at her with amazement, she was handsome, pale and bland, elated and precise, eloquent, vibrating with dignity and purpose. "Rachel, I don't think we understand each other at all."

"Well, don't worry. You'll feel relieved later on. Just try not to feel resentment against me or against Julian. You'll only make yourself miserable if you do."

I got up and went to the bureau and got out Arnold's letter. I got it out simply with the intention of making sure I had not dreamt it. Perhaps my memory really was disturbed. There was a sort of blank over Arnold's letter and yet I seemed to recall--I said, holding the letter in my hand, "Julian will come back to me. I know this. I know it just as well as I know--"What's that you have there?"

"A letter from Arnold." I began to look at the letter.

There was a ring at the front doorbell.

I threw the letter onto the table and ran out to the door in heart-agony.

A postman stood outside with a very large cardboard box, which he "Wha? sathatrP°n the fl°r"

"Parcel for Mr. Bradley Pearson."

"What is it?"

"I don't know, sir. Is that you, then? I'll just push it in, shall I? It weighs a ton." The postman nudged the big square box in through the doorway with his knee and made off. As I returned to the sitting-room I saw Francis sitting on the stairs. He had obviously been listening. He looked like an apparition, one of those ghosts that writers describe which look just like ordinary people and yet not. He smiled obsequiously. I ignored him.

Rachel was standing by the table reading the letter. I sat down. I felt very tired.

"You ought not to have shown me this letter."

"You don't know what you've done. I shall never never never

forgive you."

"But, Rachel, you said you and Arnold told each other everything, so surely you--"God, you are vile, vindictive--"It's not my fault! It can't make any difference, can it?"

"Truly, I didn't mean you to read it, it was just a crazy accident, I didn't mean to upset you. Anyway Arnold has probably changed his mind by now--"

"Of course you meant me to read it. It's your vile revenge. I hate you for this forever. You can't understand anything here, you can't understand anything at all--And to think of your having that letter and gloating over it and imagining--"I didn't gloat--"Yes, you did. Why else did you keep it except as a weapon against me, except to show it to me and hurt me because you think I deserted you--"Honestly, Rachel, I haven't given you a single thought!"

"Aaaaah--"

Rachel's scream flamed out in the darkening room, more visible suddenly than the pale round of her face. I saw the disturbed violent agony of her eyes and her mouth. She ran at me, or perhaps she was simply running to the door. I stumbled aside and crashed my elbow against the wall. She passed me like a stampeding animal and I heard the after-sigh of her scream. The front door flew open and through the open street door I saw lamplight reflected in the wet paving stones of the court.

I went out slowly and closed both doors and began turning lights on. The apparition of Francis was still sitting on the stairs. He smiled an isolated irrelevant smile, as if he were a stray minor spirit belonging to some other epoch and some other story, a sort of lost and masterless Puck, smiling a meditative cringing unprompted affectionate smile.

"You were listening."

"Brad, I'm sorry--"It doesn't matter. What the hell's this?" I kicked the cardboard box.

"I'll open it for you, Brad."

I watched while Francis tore the cardboard and dragged the top off the box.

It was full of books. The Precious Labyrinth. The Gauntlets of Power. Tobias and the Fallen Angel. A Banner with a Strange Device. Essays of a Seeker. A Skull on Fire. A Clash of Symbols. Hollows in the Sky. The Glass Sword. Mysticism and Literature. The Maid and the Magus. The Pierced Chalice. Inside a Snow Crystal.

Arnold's books. Dozens of them.

I looked at the huge compact mountain of smugly printed words. I picked up one of the books and opened it at random. Rage possessed me. With a snarl of disgust I tried to tear the book down the

middle, ripping the spine in two, but it was too tough, so I tore the pages out in handfuls. The next book was a paperback and I was able to tug it into two and then into four. I seized another one. Francis watched, his face brightening with sympathy and pleasure. Then he came down the stairs to help me, murmuring "Hi!" to himself, "Hi!" as he dragged the books to pieces and then pursued and tore again the white cascading sheaves of print. We worked resolutely through the contents of the box, standing sturdily with our feet apart like men working in a river, as the pile of dismembered debris rose about us. It took us just under ten minutes to destroy the complete works of Arnold Baffin.

"How are you feeling now, Brad?"

"All right."

I had fainted or something. I had eaten practically nothing since my return to London. Now I was sitting on the black woolly rug on the sitting-room floor with my back against one of the armchairs which was propped against the wall. The gas fire was flaring and popping. One lamp was alight. Francis had made some sandwiches and I had eaten some. I had drunk some whisky. In fact I felt very strange but not faint any more, no more little eruptions in my field of vision, no more heavy black canopies descending and bearing me to the ground. I was now on the ground and feeling very long and leaden. I could see Francis clearly in the flickering light, so clearly that I frowned over it, he was suddenly too close, too present. I looked down and noticed that he was holding one of my hands. I frowned over that too and removed it.

Francis who, as I recalled, had by now drunk a good deal of whisky, was kneeling beside me eagerly and attentively, not in an attitude of repose, as if I were something which he was making. His lips were pushed out coaxingly, the big red underlip curling over and the mucus of the mouth showing in a scarlet line. His little close eyes were sparkling with inward glee. His dispossessed hand joined his other hand, rubbing rhythmically up and down his plump thighs on the shiny shabby material of his blue suit. He made a little sympathetic chortling noise every now and then.

I felt, for the first time since my return to London, that I was in a real place and in the presence of a real person. At the same time I felt as people feel who after much ailing become suddenly far more ill and helpless, relaxed into the awfulness of the situation. I still had wit enough to see how pleased Francis was at my collapse. I did not resent his pleasure.

"Have some more whiskers, Brad, it'll do you good. Don't you worry, then. I'll find her for you."

"That's right," I said. "I'll stay here, I must. She'll come here,

won't she. This is where she'll come to. She could come at any time. I'll leave the front door open again tonight, like I did last night. She can come in then like a little bird coming to its place. She can come in."

"Tomorrow I'll search for her. I'll go to her college. I'll go to Arnold's publisher. I'll pick up a clue somewhere. I'll go first thing tomorrow morning. Don't you grieve, Brad. She'll be back, you'll see. This time next week you'll be happy."

"I know she'll come back," I said. "It's odd when one knows. Her love for me was an absolute word spoken. It belongs to the eternal. I cannot doubt that word, it is the logos of all being, and if she loves me not chaos is come again. Love is knowledge, you see, like the philosophers always told us. I know her by intuition as if she were here inside my head."

"I know, Brad. When you really love somebody it's as if the whole world's saying it."

"Everything guarantees it. Like people used to think everything guaranteed God. Have you ever loved like that, Francis?"

"Yes, Brad. There was a boy once. But he committed suicide. It was years ago."

"Oh my God, Priscilla. I keep forgetting about her."

"Steve. Don't, Brad."

"Priscilla died because nobody loved her. She dried up and collapsed inside and died like a poisoned rat. God doesn't love the world, He can't do, look at it. But I hardly seem to care at all. I loved my mother."

"Me too, Brad."

"A very silly woman, but I loved her. I felt a sense of duty to Priscilla, but that's not enough, is it?"

"I guess not, Brad."

"Because I love Julian I ought to be able to love everybody. I will be able to one day. Oh Christ, if I could only have some happiness. When she comes back I'll love everybody, I'll love Priscilla."

"Priscilla's dead, Brad."

"Love ought to triumph over time, but can it? Not time's fool, he said, and he knew about love if anybody did, he was bloody crucified if anybody was. Of course one's got to suffer. Perhaps in the end the suffering is all, it's all contained in the suffering. The final atoms of it all are simply pain. How old are you, Francis?"

"Forty-eight, Brad."

"You're ten years luckier and wiser than I am."

"I've never had any luck, Brad. I don't even hope for any more. But I still love people. Not like Steve of course, but I love them. I love you, Brad."

"She will come back. The world hasn't changed for nothing. It can't change back now. The old world has gone forever. Oh how my life has gone from me, it has ebbed away. I cannot believe I am fifty-eight."

"Have you loved a lot of women, Brad?"

"I never really loved anybody before Julian came."

"But there were women, after Chris I mean?"

"Don't say his name, Brad, please. I wish I hadn't told you it."

"Perhaps the reality is in the suffering. But it can't be. Love promises happiness. Art promises happiness. Yet it isn't exactly a promise because you don't need the future. I am happy now, I think. I'll write it all down, only not tonight."

"I envy you being a writer chap, Brad. You can say what you feel. I'm just eaten by feelings and I can't even shout."

"Yes, I can shout, I can fill the galaxy with bellowings of pain. But you know, Francis, I've never ever really explained anything. I feel now as if at last I could explain. It's as if all the matrix of my life which has been as hard and tight and small as a nut has become all luminous and spread out and huge. Everything's magnified. At last I can see it all and visit it all. Francis, I can be a great writer now, I know I can."

"Sure you can, Brad. I always knew you had it in you. You were always like you were a great man."

"I've never given myself away before, Francis, never gambled myself absolutely. I've been a timid frightened man all my life. Now I know what it's like to be beyond fear. I'm where greatness lives now. I've handed myself over. And yet it's like being under discipline too. I haven't any choice. I love, I worship and I shall be rewarded."

"Sure, Brad. She will come."

"Yes. He will come."

"Brad, I think you'd better go to bed."

"Yes, yes, to bed, to bed. Tomorrow we'll make a plan."

"You stay here and I search."

"Yes. Happiness must exist. It can't all be made of pain. But what is happiness made of? All right, all right, Francis, I'll go to bed. What's the worst image of suffering you can think of?"

"A concentration camp."

"Yes. I'll meditate on that. Good night. Perhaps she'll come back in the morning."

"Perhaps you'll be happy this time tomorrow."

The morning brought the crisis of my life. But it was not anything that I could have conceived of in my wildest imaginings.

"Wake up, wake up, Brad, here's a letter."

I sat up in bed. Francis was thrusting at me a letter in an

unfamiliar hand. It had a French stamp. I knew that it could only be from her. "Go, go, and close the door." He went. I opened the letter, shuddering, almost weeping with hope and fear. It read as follows.

Please please don't feel badly about me, don't be too sad or cross with me either. Forgive my ignorance of myself, forgive my worthless empty selfish youth. I can't quite now believe that you absolutely loved me, how could you have done. A mature woman would attract you much more deeply. I think that men like "youthful bloom" and so on but perhaps they don't really distinguish young girls much from one another and quite rightly, one is so unformed. I hope you don't think I behaved like a "loose woman." I felt great feelings and at every moment I did what seemed unavoidable. I don't regret anything unless I hurt you and you won't forgive me. I must stop this letter, I keep saying the same things over and over again, you must be quite fed up. I am so very sorry that I went without saying good-bye. (I got a lift back to London quite easily, by the way. I'd never hitch-hiked before.) I felt I had to go, though I didn't think anything else just then, and since then it has seemed more sensible to keep on with that course rather than make more muddle and misery for everybody, though I terribly terribly want to see you. We will meet again, won't we, later on perhaps, after some time, and try to be friends, when I am a little more mature. That will be something new and valuable too. I feel now, especially as we go farther and farther south, that life is full of all kinds of possibilities. I do hope I shall manage with the Italian! Oh forgive me, Bradley, forgive me. I expect by now you just feel that you have had an odd dream. I hope it has been a good dream. Mine was. Oh I do feel so unhappy though, I feel all topsy-turvy. I don't know when I've cried so much. I have been so stupid and thoughtless. I love you with real love. It was a revelation. I don't unsay anything. But it wasn't part of any life we could have lived.

Julian

"Brad, may I come in?"

I was dressing.

"Is it good news, Brad?"

"She's in Italy," I said. "I'm going after her. She's in Venice."

The letter had, of course, been written for Arnold's eye. The bit about his "providing the stamp" made that plain. The girl was being supervised, virtually a prisoner. Of course she couldn't, as she said, "explain clearly." She had continued writing a vague repetitive effusion, in the hope of being able to put in a real message at the last moment, hence the references to "not being able to end." That had proved impossible. Doubtless Arnold arrived, read the letter and told

her to complete it. Then he took it away and posted it. He would see to it that she had no money to buy stamps herself. However she had managed to tell me that she was writing under duress. She had also managed to convey her destination. "Snow and ice," to which she had drawn attention, patently meant Venice. The Italian for "snow" is "neve," and together with the reference to "Italian words," the anagram was obvious. And in "topsy-turvy" language a little place in the mountains clearly meant a large place by the sea. And Arnold had mentioned Venice, though then to mislead me. Names are not uttered at random.

"Are you going to Venice today?" said Francis, as I was getting into my trousers.

"Yes. At once."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No. The letter's in code. She's staying with a fan of Arnold's, I don't know who."

I thought for a moment. "All right. You might be useful."

"Oh good! Shall I go now and get the tickets? You should stay here, you know. She might telephone or you might get a message or something."

"All right." That made sense. I sat down on the bed. I was feeling rather faint again.

"And--I say, Brad, shall I do some detective work? I could go to Arnold's publisher and find out who his Venice admirer is."

"How?" I said. The flashing lights were coming back and I saw Francis's face, all plumped out with eagerness, surrounded by a cascade of stars, like a divine visitation in a picture.

"I'll pretend to be writing a book about how different nationalities see Arnold's work. I'll ask if they can put me in touch with his Italian admirers. They might have the address, it's worth trying."

"It's a brainwave," I said. "It's an idea of genius."

"And Brad, I'll need some money. I'll book us to Venice then."

"There may be no direct flight at once, if there isn't book us through Milan."

"And I'll get some maps and guide-books, we'll need a map of the city, won't we?"

"Yes, yes."

"Make me a cheque then, Brad. Here's your cheque book. Make it out to 'bearer' and I can take it to your bank. Make it a big one, Brad, so I can book us the best way. And Brad, would you mind, I haven't any clothes, it'll be hot there, won't it, do you mind if I buy some summer clothes, I haven't a thing?"

"Yes. Buy anything. Buy the guides and a map, that's a good

idea. And go to the publisher. Yes, yes."

"Can I buy you some things, you know, a sun hat or a dictionary or anything?"

"No. Go quickly. Here." I gave him a large cheque.

"Oh thanks, Brad! You stay here and rest. I'll be back. Oh how exciting! Brad, do you know, I've never been to Italy, ever at all!"

When he had gone I went into the sitting-room. I had a blessed purpose now, an objective, a place in the world where she might be. I ought to be packing a suitcase. I felt incapable of doing so. Francis would pack my case. I felt faint with longing for Julian. I still held her letter in my hand.

In the bureau bookcase opposite to me were the love poems of Dante. I pulled them out. And as I touched the book I felt, so strange is the chemistry of love, that my embroiled heart was furthering its history. I felt love now in the form of a sort of divine anger. What I was suffering for that girl. Of course I would love my pain. But there is a rich anger which is bred so, and which is of the purest stuff that love is ever made of. Dante, who spoke his name so often and suffered so at his hands, knew that.

S'io avessi le belle trecce press, che fatte son per me scudiscio e ferza, pigliandole anzi terza, con esse passerei vespero e squille: e non sarei pietoso ne cortese, ami farei com' orso quando scherza; e se Amor me ne sferza, io mi vendicherei di piu di mille.

Ancor ne It occhi, and' escon le faville che m'infiammono il cor, ch'io porto anciso, guarderei presso e fiso, per vendicar lo fuggir che mi face: e poi le renderei con Amor pace.

I was lying face downwards on the floor, holding Julian's letter and the Rime together against my heart, when the telephone rang. I staggered up amid black constellations and got to the instrument. I heard Julian's voice.

No, it was not her voice, it was Rachel's. Only Rachel's voice, in emotion, horribly recalling that of her daughter.

"Oh--" I said, "Oh--", holding the telephone away from me. I saw Julian in that second in a jagged explosion of vision, in her black tights and her black jerkin and her white shirt, holding the sheep's skull up before my face.

"What is it, Rachel, I can't hear?"

"Bradley, could you come round at once."

"I'm just leaving London."

"Please could you come round at once, it's very, very urgent."

"Can't you come here!"

"No. Bradley, you must come, I beg you. Please come, it's something about Julian."

"Rachel, she is in Venice, isn't she? Do you know her address?

I've had a letter from her. She's staying with a fan of Arnold's. Do you know? Have you got an address book of Arnold's you could look it up in?"

"Bradley, come round here at once. It's very--important. I'll tell you everything--you want to know--only come--"What is it, Rachel? Rachel, is Julian all right? You haven't heard anything awful? Oh God, have they had a car accident?"

"I'll tell you everything. Just come here. Come, come, at once, in a taxi, every moment matters."

"Rachel, is Julian all right?"

"Yes, yes, yes, just come--I paid the taxi with trembling hands, dropping the money all over the place, and ran up the path and began banging on the knocker. Rachel opened the door at once.

I hardly recognized her. Or rather, I recognized her as a portentous revenant, the weeping distraught figure of the beginning of the story, her face grossly swollen with tears and, it seemed, again bruised, or perhaps just dirtied as a child's may be after much rubbing away of tears.

"Rachel, there's been a car accident, they've telephoned, she's hurt? What's happened, what's happened?"

Rachel sat down on a chair in the hall and began to moan, uttering great terrible ringing moans, swaying herself to and fro.

"Rachel--something terrible has happened to Julian--what is it? Oh God, what has happened?"

Rachel got up after a moment or two, still moaning and supporting herself against the wall. Her hair was a thick tangled frizzy mass, like the hair of the insane, torn at and dragged across her brow and eyes. Her mouth, all wet, was open and shuddering. Her eyes, oozing great tears, were slits between the swollen lids. Laboriously, like an animal, she pushed past me, still leaning with one hand on the wall, and made her way towards the door of the drawing-room. She pushed it open and made a gesture forward. I followed her into the doorway.

Arnold lay sideways, his knees up, one hand palm upward extended towards my foot. His eyes were half closed, showing a glint of white eyeball, his teeth were gritted together and the lips slightly withdrawn from them as if in a snarl. There was blood caking his pale tossed hair and dried in marbled patterns on his cheek and neck. I could see that the skull was appallingly dinted at the side, the darkened hair descending into the depression, as if Arnold's head had been made of wax and someone had pressed strong fingers hard in. A vein at the temple still oozed a little.

A large poker was lying on the carpet where the blood was. The blood was red and sticky, the consistency of custard, skinning a

little on the surface. I touched, then held, Arnold's tweedy shoulder, warm with the sun, trying to stir him a little, but he seemed as weighty as lead, bolted to the floor, or else my trembling limbs had no strength. I stepped back with blood upon my shoes, and trod upon Arnold's glasses which were lying just beyond the circle of blood.

"Oh God--you did that--with the poker--She whispered, "He's dead--he must be--is he?"

"I don't know--Oh God--"He's dead, he's dead," she whispered.

"Have you sent for the--Oh Christ--what happened?"

"I hit him--we were shouting--I didn't mean--then he started screaming with pain--I couldn't bear to hear him screaming like that--I hit him again to stop him screaming--"We must hide the poker--you must say it was an accident--Oh what shall we do--He can't be dead, he can't be--"I kept calling him and calling him and calling him, but he wouldn't move." Rachel was still whispering, standing in the doorway of the room. She had stopped crying and her staring eyes seemed larger and wider, she kept rubbing her hands rhythmically upon her dress.

"He may be all right," I said. "Don't worry. Did you ring the doctor?"

"He's dead."

"Did you ring the doctor?"

"No."

"I'll get the doctor--And the police--I suppose--And an ambulance--Tell them he fell and hit his head or something--Oh Christ--I'll take the poker away anyhow--Better say he hit you and--"

I picked up the poker. I stared for a moment at Arnold's face. The sightless eye-glint was terrible. I felt sick urgent panic, the desire to hand this nightmare over as quickly as possible to somebody else. As I moved towards the door I saw something on the floor near Rachel's feet. A screwed-up ball of paper. Arnold's writing. I picked it up and brushed past her where she still stood leaning in the doorway. I went out into the kitchen and put the poker down on the table. The ball of paper was Arnold's letter to me about Christian. I took out a box of matches and began to burn the letter in the sink. It kept falling into a basin of water since my hands would not obey me. When at last I had reduced it to ashes I turned the tap on it. Then I started washing the poker. Some of Arnold's hair was stuck to it with blood. I dried it and put it away in a cupboard.

"Rachel, I'm going to telephone. Shall I telephone just a doctor or the police as well? What are you going to say?"

"It's no good--" She turned back into the hall, and we stood there together in the dim light beside the stained-glass panel of the front door.

"You mean it's no good not telling the truth?"

"No good--"

"But you must tell them it was an accident--that he hit you first--that it was self-defence--Rachel, shall I telephone the police? Oh do please try to think--'

She murmured something.

"What?"

"Dobbin. Dobbin. My darling--"

I realized, as she now turned away, that this must be her pet name for Arnold which in all the years I had known them I had never heard her utter. Arnold's secret name. She turned away from me and went into the dining-room, where I heard her fall, onto the floor or perhaps into a chair. I heard her begin to lament once more, a short cry, then a shuddering "fa-fa-fa--" then the cry again. I went back into the drawing-room to see if Arnold had moved. I almost feared to see him opening accusing eyes, wriggling with the pain which Rachel had found so unendurable. He had not moved.

His position seemed now as inevitable as that of a statue. Already he did not look like himself any more, his grimacing expression that of a complete stranger, expressing, like a Chinaman, some quite strange and unrecognizable emotion. His sharp nose was red with blood, and there was a little puddle of blood in his ear. The white eye glinted, the pained mouth snarled. As I turned from him I noticed his small feet, which I had always found so characteristic and so annoying, clad in immaculately polished brown shoes, lying neatly together as if comforting each other. And as I moved to the door I now saw little smears of blood everywhere, on the chairs, on the wall, on the tiles of the fireplace, where in some unimaginable scene in some quite other region of the world he had reeled about; and saw upon the carpet the shadowy marks of bloody footprints, his, Rachel's, mine.

I got to the telephone in the hall. Rachel's cries were softening into little almost dreamy wails. I dialled 999 and got a hospital and said there had been a bad accident and asked for an ambulance. "A man has hurt his head. His skull cracked I think. Yes." Then after a moment's hesitation I rang the police and said the same things. My own fear of the police made any other course unthinkable. Rachel was right, concealment was not possible, better to reveal all at once, anything was better than the horror of being "found out." It was no good saying Arnold had fallen downstairs. Rachel was in no condition to be taught a cover story. She would blurt out the truth in any case.

I went into the dining-room and looked at her. She was sitting on the floor with her mouth wide open and her two hands squeezing either side of her face. I saw her mouth as a round O, she

looked subhuman and damned, her face without features, her flesh drained and blue, like those who live underground. "Rachel. Don't worry. They're coming."

"Dobbin. Dobbin. Dobbin."

I went out and sat on the stairs and found that I was saying, "Oh--oh--oh--oh--" and could not stop.

The police arrived first. I let them in and pointed to the back room. Through the open front door I saw the sunny street and cars coming, an ambulance. I heard somebody say, "He's dead."

"What happened?"

"Ask Mrs. Baffin. In there."

"Who are you?"

Men in dark clothes were coming in, then men in white clothes.

The dining-room door was shut. I was explaining who Arnold was, who I was, how I came to be there.

"Cracked his skull like an egg shell."

Rachel screamed behind a closed door.

"Come with us, please."

I sat in a police car between two men. I started explaining again. I said, "He hit her, I think. It was an accident. It wasn't murder."

At the police station I told them all over again who I was. I sat with several men in a small room.

"Why did you do it?"

"Do what?"

"Why did you kill Arnold Baffin?"

"I didn't kill Arnold Baffin."

"What did you hit him with?"

"I didn't hit him."

"Why did you do it? Why did you do it? Why did you kill him?"

"I didn't kill him."

"Why did you do it?"

Postscript By Bradley Pearson

How little in fact any human being understands about anything the practice of the arts soon teaches one. An inch away from the world one is accustomed to there are other worlds in which one is a complete stranger. Nature normally heals with oblivious forgetfulness those who are rudely hustled by circumstance from one into another. But if after reflection and with deliberation one attempts with words to create bridges and to open vistas one soon finds out how puny is one's power to describe or to connect. Art is a kind of artificial memory and the pain which attends all serious art is a sense of that factitiousness. Most artists are the minor poets of their little world, who have only one voice and can sing only one song.

The first days were a maelstrom of confusion, misunderstandings, incredulity. Not only could I not believe what had happened, I could not conceptualize it. However I am not going to tell anything more of this as a story. The story is over. And what it is the story of I shall attempt in a little while to say. As the time went on I tried various attitudes, said various things, changed my mind, told the truth, then lied, then broke down, was impassive, then devious, then abject. None of this helped at the trial. Rachel in black was a touching figure. Everyone deferred and was sympathetic. The judge had a special inclination of the shoulders and a special grave smile. I do not think anything was planned in cold blood. It occurred to me later that of course the police themselves had decided what had happened, they suggested it to Rachel, they told her what it was all about. She may even have tried to be, at the start, incoherently truthful. But the story was so impossible. The poker, wiped clean of her fingerprints and liberally covered with my own, was soon found. The whole thing was obvious. All Rachel had to do was scream. I for my part acted as guiltily as any man could. Perhaps at moments I almost believed that I had killed him, just as at moments perhaps she almost believed that she had not.

I was about to write down, "I do not blame her," but this would be misleading. It is not exactly, on the other hand, that I blame her. What she did was terrible, both her actions were wicked, the murder and the lie. And I suppose I owe it to her as a kind of duty to see what she did, to look at it and to try to understand it. "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned." In a way I might have been flattered. In a way there was something almost to admire, a great spirit, a great will. For of course I did not envisage her as moved by any mere petty pusillanimous desire to preserve herself. What did she feel during the

trial and afterwards? Perhaps she thought that I would somehow get off. Perhaps she only settled very gradually with many self-preserving vaguenesses into her final dreadful role.

There was even a sort of perfection about it. She had taken such a perfect revenge upon the two men in her life. Some women never forgive. "I would not give him my hair for a bowstring at the end. I would not raise a finger to save him dying." Christian had joined Arnold in France, as I learnt much later. But no doubt the will that powered that hammerblow had been forged much earlier. When I glimpsed it at the start of my narration it was already steely strong. There was, almost, no surprise here. What did surprise me was the strength of Rachel's feeling for myself. There must have been, to create such a great hate, a very considerable degree of love. I had simply not noticed that Rachel loved me. She must have cared deeply to be able, in order to destroy me, to lie so hugely and so consistently. I ought to have been moved to reverence. Later perhaps I was. No, I do not exactly "blame," though neither do I "condone." I am not sure what "forgiveness" means. I have cut attachments, I have "let her off," I feel no thrilling connection of resentment between us. In some blank way I even wish her well. Forgiveness is often thought of as an emotion. It is not that. It is rather a certain kind of cessation of emotion. So perhaps I do indeed forgive. It matters little what words one uses here. In fact she was an instrument which did me a very great service.

I did at times accuse her, then withdrew my accusations. It is not altogether easy to save oneself at the expense of another, even justly. I felt at times, it is hard to describe this, almost mad with guilt, with a sort of general guilt about my whole life. Put any man in the dock and he will feel guilty. I rolled in my guilt, in the very filth of it. Some newspapers said I seemed to enjoy my trial. I did not enjoy it, but I experienced it very intently and fully. My ability to do this was dependent upon the fact that capital punishment had by this time been abolished in England. I could not have faced the hangman with equanimity. The vague prospect of prison affected me, in my enhanced and vivid new consciousness, comparatively little. (It is in fact impossible to imagine beforehand what prolonged imprisonment is like.) I had been forcibly presented with a new mode of being and I was anxious to explore it. I had been confronted (at last) with a sizeable ordeal labelled with my name. This was not something to be wasted. I had never felt more alert and alive in my life, and from the vantage point of my new consciousness I looked back upon what I had been: a timid incomplete resentful man.

Hartbourne and Francis, in their different ways, did what they could for me. Hartbourne's line, worked out after discussions

with my lawyer, was that I was insane. ("That cock won't fight, old man!" I shouted to him across the courtroom.) His evidence for this view was rather slender. It appeared that I frequently cancelled appointments. ("Then are we all mad?" said the prosecuting counsel.) I had forgotten to attend a party which had been arranged in my honour. I was moody and eccentric and absent-minded. I imagined myself to be a writer. ("But he is a writer!" said the prosecuting counsel. I applauded.) My apparently calm reaction to my sister's death which the insanity lobby also tried to use, was later taken over by the prosecution as a proof of my callousness. The climax and raison d'etre of the theory was that I had killed Arnold in a brain storm and then forgotten all about it! And if I had displayed uncertainty and clutched my head more often this idea might have been at least worth entertaining. As it was, I appeared as a liar but not as a lunatic. I calmly and lucidly denied that I was mad, and the judge and the jury agreed with me. Hartbourne believed me guilty of course.

Francis alone did not believe me guilty. However he was able to render little assistance. He marred his evidence by crying all the way through, which made a bad impression on the jury. And as a "character witness" he was not exactly a felicitous performer. The prosecutor sneered at him openly. And he told so many simpleminded lies and half-lies in his anxiety to defend me that he be334 POSTSCRIPT BY BRADLEY PEARSON came in the end something of a figure of fun, even to my own side. The judge treated him with heavy irony. It was, to say the least, unfortunate for me that Francis had not been with me when Rachel telephoned. Francis, latching onto this, soon started saying that he had been: but was then quite unable to give any account of what had happened which could stand up to the simplest queries from the prosecution. The jury clearly believed that Francis was my "creature" and that I had somehow "put him up to it." And the prosecution soon tied him in a knot. "Why then did you not accompany the accused to Baling?"

"I had to go out to buy tickets for Venice."

"For Venice?"

"Yes, he and I were just going to go to Venice together." (Laughter.) In fact, all that Francis managed (quite involuntarily) to contribute to the argument was another sinister theory about my motives, to the effect that I was a homosexual, madly in love with Arnold, and that I had killed him out of jealousy! Some of the lewder newspapers ran this idea for a while. However the judge, probably out of consideration for Rachel's feelings, did not highlight it in his final summing up.

Christian was one of the stars of the case. She always dressed with great care, wearing, as the papers soon noticed, a different

ensemble every day. "A smart rich woman" was just what the journalists wanted, and she even achieved during the days of the trial a kind of fame which stood her in good stead later when she decided to set up in business in haute couture. In fact she probably developed the idea at this very time. She was very concerned about me. (She too quite evidently believed me guilty.) But she just could not help enjoying the trial. She was in all appearance a "good witness." She spoke clearly and firmly and lucidly, and the judge, who patently found her attractive, complimented her on her evidence. The jury liked her too, there were several men who always exchanged glances when she appeared. However in the hands of a clever public prosecutor she was easily made to damage my case without even noticing. Questioned about our marriage, she was made to convey the impression that I was a thoroughly unstable person if not indeed a "nasty bit of work." ("You would describe your former husband as an intense man?"

"Oh awfully intense!") At one point her sheer idiotic self-satisfaction moved me so much that I shouted out, "Good old Chris!" The judge reacted as to a molester of virtuous womanhood. A Sunday paper offered her a large sum of money for her "story," but she refused.

It never entered anyone's head that she could have had a motive for killing her husband. Marriage is a very private place. I had myself destroyed the only piece of solid evidence for such a view. (Arnold's letter about Christian.) The excellence of her marriage, assumed by all, was piously touched upon by some witnesses. It was unnecessary to stress it. Equally, it was never suggested that I had any designs upon my victim's wife. Delicacy, everywhere so manifest in this model trial, forbade any such notion, though it might have seemed obvious enough as a speculation. Even the newspapers, so far as I know, did not pursue it, possibly because the idea that it was Arnold whom I loved was more amusing. And delicacy, as it so often does, usurped the place of truth.

More felicitously, as a result of a spontaneous conspiracy of silence, Julian's name was simply not mentioned at all. No one had any reason to bring her in since, on the one hand, I was in bad enough trouble anyway, and, on the other, that story could only do me harm. So Julian vanished. It was as if the whole fantastic scene in the Old Bailey courtroom, the robed and wigged celebrants, the sober yet histrionic witnesses, the quiet gleeful public, were all part of a machinery of magic designed to dematerialize her and make her as if she had never been. Yet at moments her paramount reality in that scene was such that I wanted to shout out her name again and again. However I did not. This silence at least which was enjoined was also

achieved. Those who know will understand how in a curious way I was almost relieved to think how she had now been made perfect by being removed into the sphere of the impossible. This idea indeed provided a focus of contemplation which alleviated the awful sufferings of that time.

In a purely technical sense I was condemned for having murdered Arnold. (The jury were out of the room for less than half an hour. POSTSCRIPT BY BRADLEY PEARSON) Counsel did not even bother to leave their seats.) In a more extended sense, and this too provided fruit for meditation, I was condemned for being a certain awful kind of person. I aroused horror and aversion in the bosom of the judge and in the bosoms of the honest citizens of the jury and the sturdy watchdogs of the press. I was heartily hated. In sentencing me to life imprisonment the judge gave general satisfaction. It was a mean crime of an unusual pure kind: to kill one's friend out of envy of his talents. And poor Priscilla, risen from the grave, seemed to point her finger at me too. I had failed as a friend and I had failed as a brother. My insensibility to my sister's plight and then to her death was attested by several. The defence, as I said, did their best to use this as proof of mental unbalance. But the general view was simply that it proved me a monster.

I gave myself up to the course of events with a certain resignation and without screams of protest, for another and deeper reason too, which had to do with Julian. Or perhaps there were two reasons here, one lying above the other. Or perhaps three. What did I believe that Julian thought about what had happened? In a strange way I was almost entirely agnostic about what Julian thought. I did not imagine that she saw me as a murderer. But neither did I expect her to defend me by accusing her mother. My love for Julian had somehow brought about this death. (This piece of causality I was quite clear about.) And my responsibility for it I was prepared to lodge forever in the mystery of my love for Julian and her love for me. That was part of it. But I also felt something like this, that the emergence of my life out of quietness into public drama and horror was a necessary and in some deep sense natural outcome of the visitation with which I had been honoured. Sometimes I thought of it as a punishment for the failure of my vow of silence. Sometimes, shifting the same idea only very slightly, it seemed more like a reward. Because I loved Julian something huge had happened to me. I had been given the privilege of an ordeal. That I suffered through her and for her was, in addition, a delightful, almost frivolous comfort.

The court saw me, as I have said, as a fantastical man. Little did they know how fantastical I was, though not in their crude sense. It is the literal truth that the image of Julian was not absent from my

mind for a single second during the waking hours of those terrible days. I apprehended at the same time her absolute presence and her absolute absence. There were moments when I felt as if I were being literally torn to pieces by love. (What must it be like to be eaten by a large animal? I felt I knew.) This pain, from which I almost fainted, once or twice came upon me when I was addressing the court, and abruptly stopped my utterance, thereby giving comfort to the insanity lobby. Perhaps the only thing which made me survive this period of thinking about Julian was the complete absence of hope. A grain of hope present at that time would have killed me.

The psyche, desperate for its survival, discovers deep things. How 338 POSTSCRIPT BY BRADLEY PEARSON little most so-called psychologists seem to know about its shifts and its burrowings. At some point in a black vision I apprehended the future. I saw this book, which I have written, I saw my dearest friend P. L., I saw myself a new man, altered out of recognition. I saw beyond and beyond. The book had to come into being because of Julian, and because of the book Julian had to be. It was not, though indeed time matters little to the unconscious mind, that the book was the frame which she came to fill, nor was she the frame which the book filled. She somehow was and is the book, the story of herself. This is her deification and incidentally her immortality. It is my gift to her and my final possession of her. From this embrace she can never now escape. But, and this is not to belittle my darling, I saw much more than this in the black glass of the future. And this is, if I can express it, the deepest reason why I accepted the unjust judgment of the court.

I felt that every single thing that was happening to me was not just predestined but somehow actively at the moment of its occurrence thought by a divine power which held me in its talons. At times I felt almost as if I were holding my breath in case some tiny movement of my own should interfere with the course of this divine possession. Though in the same thought I also knew that I could not now, by the most frenzied struggling, ever escape my fate. The courtroom and the judge and the condemnation for life were mere shadows of a much huger and more real drama of which I was the hero and the victim. Human love is the gateway to all knowledge, as Plato understood. And through the door that Julian opened my being passed into another world.

About these things, my dear fellow, we in our seclusion have often spoken, in our times of quietness together, with words whose meaning glowed out of an ineffable understanding, like flames upon dark water. So friends, so spirits, ultimately converse. It was for this that Plato, in his wisdom, forbade the artists. Socrates wrote nothing, neither did Christ. Almost all speech which is not so illumined is a

deformation of the truth. And yet: I am writing these words and others whom I do not know will read them. With and by this paradox I have lived, dear friend, in our sequestered peace. Perhaps it will always be for some an unavoidable paradox, but one which is only truly lived when it is also a martyrdom.

I do not know whether I shall see the "outside world" again. (A curious phrase. The world is, in reality, all outside, all inside.) The question is of no interest to me. A truthful vision finds the fullness of reality everywhere and the whole extended universe in a little room. That old brick wall which we have so often contemplated together, my dear friend and teacher: how could I find words to express its glowing beauty, lovelier and more sublime than the beauty of hills and waterfalls and unfolding flowers? These are indeed vulgarisms, commonplaces. What we have seen together is a beauty and a glory beyond words, the world transfigured, found. It was this, which in the bliss of quietness I now enjoy, which I glimpsed prefigured in madness in the water-colour blue eyes of Julian Baffin. She images it for me still in my dreams, as the icons of childhood still haunt the visions of the ageing sage. May it be always so, for nothing is lost, and even at the end we are ever at the beginning.

And I found you, my friend, the crown of my quest. Could you not have existed, could you not have been waiting for me in this monastery which we have inhabited together? That is impossible, my dear. Were you there by accident? No, no, I should have had to invent you, and by the power which you yourself bestow I should have been able to. Now indeed I can see my life as a quest and an 340 POSTSCRIPT BY BRADLEY PEARSON ascesis, but lost until the end in ignorance and dark. I was seeking you, I was seeking him, and the knowledge beyond all persons which has no name at all. So I sought you long and in sorrow, and in the end you consoled me for my lifelong deprivation of you by suffering with me. And the suffering became joy.

So we live on together here in our quiet monastery, as we are pleased to call it. And so I come to the end of this book. I do not know if I shall write another. You have taught me to live in the present and to forswear the fruitless anxious pain which binds to past and to future our miserable local arc of the great wheel of desire. Art is a vain and hollow show, a toy of gross illusion, unless it points beyond itself and moves ever whither it points. You who are a musician have shown me this, in the wordless ultimate regions of your art, where form and substance hover upon the brink of silence, and where articulate forms negate themselves and vanish into ecstasy. Whether words can travel that path, through truth, absurdity, simplicity, to silence I do not know, nor what that path can be like. I may write

again. Or may at last abjure what you have made me see to be but a rough magic.

This book has been in some way the story of my life. But it has also been, I hope, an honest tale, a simple love story. And I would not wish it to seem at the end that I have, in my own sequestered happiness, somehow forgotten the real being of those who have figured as my characters. I will mention two. Priscilla. May I never in my thought knit up the precise and random detail of her wretchedness so as to forget that her death was not a necessity. And Julian. I do not, my darling girl, however passionately and intensely my thought has worked upon your being, really imagine that I invented you. Eternally you escape my embrace. Art cannot assimilate you nor thought digest you. I do not now know, or want to know, anything about your life. For me, you have gone into the dark. Yet elsewhere I realize, and I meditate upon this knowledge, that you laugh, you cry, you read books and cook meals and yawn and lie perhaps in someone's arms. This knowledge too may I never deny, and may I never forget how in the humble hard time-ridden reality of my life I loved you. That love remains, Julian, not diminished though changing, a love with a very clear and a very faithful memory. It causes me on the whole remarkably little pain. Only sometimes at night when I think that you live now and are somewhere, I shed tears.

Postscripts by Dramatis Personae

Christian Hartbourne

POSTSCRIPT pry

FRANCIS

It is my pleasure and privilege to add a critical epilogue to this unusual "autobiography." I do so gladly as homage to my old friend, still languishing in "durance vile," and I do so dutifully as a service to the cause of science. This remarkable piece of self-analysis from a talented pen deserves a thoroughly detailed commentary, for which, the publisher tells me, there is unfortunately no space in this volume. I intend however to publish in due course a lengthy book, upon which I have now been at work for some time, about the case of Bradley Pearson, and in this work the "autobiography," a prime piece of evidence in this cause celebre, will of course be fully treated. What follows here is merely a digest of a few concise points.

It is also of course clear from the most casual scrutiny that our subject is homosexual. He has the typical narcissism of the breed. (Consider his description of himself at the beginning of the tale.) His masochism (of which more below), his eager professions of virility, his confessed lack of identity, his attitude (already mentioned) to women, the evidence of his parental relationship patterns, all these point in the same direction. And indeed his rather surprising "unconvincingness" at the trial may be laid at the same door. He did not believe in himself and so could hardly expect the judge and jury to lend him credence. Bradley Pearson connected this absence of any sense of self with his mode of existence as an artist. But here, as so many of the uninstructed, he mistook cause and symptom. Most artists are homosexual. This tender appreciative tribe, bereft of sturdy self-assertion as either man or woman, is best enabled thus to body forth the world and give it houseroom in their souls.

That "Bradley Pearson's Story" is the tale of a man in love

with a woman need cause little embarrassment to our theory. Bradley himself gives us all the clues that we are in need of. When he first (in the story) catches sight of his young lady he mistakes her for a boy. He falls in love with her when he imagines her as a man. He achieves sexual intercourse with her when she has dressed up as a prince. (And who incidentally is Bradley Pearson's favourite author? The greatest homosexual of them all. What sends Bradley Pearson's fantasy soaring as high as the Post Office Tower? The idea of boys pretending to be girls pretending to be boys!) Further: who in reality is this girl? (Father-fixated of course and taking Bradley as a father-substitute, no mystery there.) The daughter of Bradley's protege, rival, idol, gadfly, friend, enemy, alter ego, Arnold Baffin. Science proclaims that this cannot be the work of accident. And science is right.

When I say that Bradley Pearson was in love with Arnold Baffin I would not be understood to be making any crude statement. We are dealing with the psychology of a complicated and refined per348 FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE son. Bradley's more simple, more human, affection bore perhaps upon another object. But Arnold symbolized the focus of passion and the goal of love to this unfortunate self-darkened victim. It was Arnold whom he loved and Arnold whom he hated, Arnold his own distorted image in the stream over which Narcissus leans eternally anxious, eternally enraptured. He admits, significant word, that there is something "demonic" in Arnold and also in himself. The "character" of Arnold is in a literary sense markedly "weak," as any critic would point out. Why indeed is the whole story oddly "unconvincing" as if it were somehow hollow? Why do we feel that something is missing from it? Because Bradley does not "come clean." He often says that he is attached to Arnold or that he is envious of Arnold or that he is obsessed by Arnold, but he does not, he dare not, body these feelings forth in the narrative. And because of this omission the tale, which should feel very hot, feels in fact very cold.

This classical misplacement is not however the chief item of interest. The case is interesting mainly because Bradley Pearson is an artist and because, before our very eyes, he is ingeniously (and often disingenuously) reflecting about his art. As he says, the psyche desperate for its survival invents deep things. That he often does not realize the significance of his reflections can make his work, with suitable expert exposition, yet more fascinating and instructive to us. That Bradley is a masochist is here a banality of criticism. (That all artists are is a further truism.) How readily recognizable to the expert eye is obsession in literature! Even the greatest cannot cover their tracks, conceal their little vices, altogether moderate the note of glee! For this the artist labours, to get this scene in, to savour this secret

symbol of his secret love. But let him be never so cunning, he cannot evade the eye of science. (This is one reason why artists always fear and denigrate scientists.) Bradley is cunning, particularly in his misleading celebration of a simple heterosexual subject, but how can we not notice that what he really enjoys is being discomfited by Arnold Baffin?

Of greater interest, as psychology if not as literature, is Bradley's more poetic and more conscious embroidery upon his own theme. The mysterious title of the book, ambiguous in I cannot readily say how many senses, is, though somewhat obscurely, "explained" for us by its author. Bradley speaks of "the black Eros." He also mentions some yet more arcane source of inspiration. What he means, taken at its face value, may be highly significant or may be pretentious rubbish. There can be no doubt however of the psychological "weight" of such a conception. It is surely more natural for a man to picture the force of love as a woman, and for a woman to picture it as a man. (It is true that both Eros and Aphrodite are the inventions of men, but it is important that the former is the child of the latter.) Yet Bradley shamelessly delights in the conception of the huge black bully (like an enormous blackamoor) who has, as he conceives it, come to discipline his life, as artist and as man. Moreover (and what do we need more to complete our theory?) should we wish to enquire further concerning the identity of this monster we have only to consider the two initial letters of his name. (Black Prince. Bradley Pearson.) As for the alleged Mr. Loxias, he too is soon seen to be our friend in a thin disguise. There is even a marked similarity of literary style. The narcissism of the deviant eats up all other characters and will tolerate only one: himself. Bradley invents Mr. Loxias so as to present himself to the world with a flourish of alleged objectivity. He says of P. Loxias, "I could have invented him." In fact he did!

I hope that my old friend, when his sapient eye alights upon these pages, will look indulgently (I can imagine him smiling with that familiar self-conscious irony) upon the observations of a mere scientist. They are prompted, let me assure him, not just by a chill love for truth, but by a lively affection for a very lovable human being, to whom the author of this note feels recognition and gratitude. I have hinted earlier that Bradley was blessed with another more mundane and more "real" attachment, another much simpler 350 FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE and less tormenting focus of emotion. I would not, and indeed need not, use his ill-concealed love for me as evidence of his perverted tendencies. (The transparent attempt to belittle the love-object is again typical.) I cannot however close this very miniature monograph without saying this to him: I knew of his feelings and, I trust he will believe me, I

valued them highly.

Francis Marloe

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSULTANT

A subscription list for my forthcoming work, Bradley Pearson, the Paranoiac from the Paper Shop, is now open c/o the publisher. Letters to my consulting rooms will be forwarded from the same address.

POSTSCRIPT

BY

RACHEL

JLhc lave been asked by a "Mr. Loxias" for my comments on a piece of fantastic writing by the murderer of my husband. I was inclined at first simply to ignore the request. I also considered resorting to legal action to prevent publication. However there has already been, and I am sure not accidentally, a good deal of publicity about the matter, and to stifle this "outpouring" might give it the interest of a secret document without in the end concealing what it said. Frankness is better and compassion is better. For we must, I think, feel or attempt to feel pity and compassion for the author of this fantasy. It is sad that when provided with the "seclusion" which he professes always to have wanted, what Pearson produces is a sort of mad adolescent dream, and not the serious work of art of which he imagined himself capable and of which he so incessantly told us.

I have certainly no wish to be unkind. The revived publicity about this hideous tragedy has caused me great suffering. That my own life has been "ruined" is a fact with which I have to live. I hope and believe that unhappiness has not made me bitter. I do not want to hurt anybody. And I do not believe that my frankness now can possibly hurt Bradley Pearson, who seems to be invincibly wrapped up in his own fantastic conceptions of what happened and of what he

himself is like.

About his account of events there is little to be said. It is in its main outline clearly a "dream" such as might interest a psychologist. And let me say here that I do not and cannot judge Bradley Pearson's motives in writing it. (Of Mr. Loxias's motives I will speak below.) Perhaps the kindest thing to say is that he wanted to write a novel but found himself incapable of producing anything except his own immediate fantasies. I expect many novelists rewrite their own recent histories "nearer to the heart's desire," but they have at least the decency to change the names. BP (as I shall 352 FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE shorten his name henceforth) alleges that in prison he has found God (or Truth or Religion or something). Perhaps all men in prison think they have found God, and have to in order to survive. I feel no vendetta-like resentment against him now, or any particular desire that he should suffer. His suffering cannot repair my loss. His new "creed" may be sincerely believed in or may be, as the whole story may be, a smoke-screen to conceal his unrepentant malice. If his tale is indeed prompted by malice we have to do with a person so wicked that ordinary judgment of him is baffled. If, as is much more likely, BP has come to believe or half believe both in his "salvation" and in his story, then we have to do with one whose mind has given way under continued strain. (He was certainly not insane at the time of the murder.) And then he must be, as I said earlier, an object of pity. This is how I prefer to view him, though really I cannot know, and indeed do not want to know, what is in fact the case. When BP went through the gates of the prison I felt as if he had died and I wanted to concern myself with him no more. To think about him, for instance with anger and rage, would have caused too much misery, besides being fruitless and immoral.

I spoke advisedly of an "adolescent" fantasy. BP is what might be called a "Peter Pan" type. He does not in his story describe his extensive past life, except for hinting that there were romances with women. He is the sort of man who likes both to hint at a past and to behave as if he were eternally twenty-five. (He speaks of himself as an ageing Don Juan, as if there were only a trivial difference between real and imagined conquests! I doubt if there were really many women in his life.) A psychiatrist would probably find him "retarded." His tastes in literature were juvenile. He speaks grandly of Shakespeare and of Homer, but I doubt if he had read the former since schooldays or the latter ever. His constant reading, which of course he nowhere admits, was mediocre adventure stories by authors such as Forester and Stevenson and Mulford. He really liked boys' stories, tales of crude adventure with no love interest, where he could identify

himself with some princely hero, a man with a sword or such. My husband often commented to me about this, and once tackled BP directly. BP was upset and I can recall him actually blushing very much at the charge.

BP was of course a person painfully conscious of inferiority. He was an unhappy disappointed man, ashamed of his social origin and his illiteracy, and stupidly ashamed of his job which he imagined made him a figure of fun. In fact he was, though not for that reason, a figure of fun to all of us. No one, before the tragedy, could mention him without smiling a little. He must have realized this. I suppose it is possible, and it is a shocking thought, that a man might commit a serious crime just in order to stop people from laughing at him. That BP was a man who hated being laughed at -is pretty clear throughout the story. The rather pompous self-mocking style is a defence and a sort of meeting people half-way if they decide to laugh.

Of course he turns everything topsy-turvy in his account of his relations with our family. He says rather coyly that we needed him. The truth was that he needed us and was a sort of parasite, an awful nuisance sometimes. He was very lonely and we all felt sorry for him. And I can remember occasions too when we made absurd excuses when he wanted to see us or hid when he rang the doorbell. His relations with my husband were crucial of course. His claim to have "discovered" my husband is ridiculous. My husband was already quite famous when BP after much begging, persuaded an editor to let him review one of my husband's books, and after that he made himself known to us and became, as I think my daughter once put it, "the family pussycat."

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FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE BP cannot even in his dream-story conceal that he was envious of my husband's success. I think this envy was an absolute obsession with him, he was eaten up by it. He knew also that my husband, though friendly and kind to him, despised him a little and laughed at him. The idea of this caused him torment. Sometimes I felt that he thought about nothing else. He naively himself admits that he had to be friends with Arnold, and so somehow identify with him and "take credit" for his writing, so as not to be driven mad with envy and hate. If an accuser is needed BP is his own. He admits too in a moment of candour that his picture of Arnold is prejudiced. This is putting it mildly. (He admits further to a general hatred of the human race!) Of course he never "helped" Arnold, but Arnold often helped him. His relation to myself and my husband was virtually that of a child to its parents. This too might interest a psychiatrist. But I do not want to enlarge any more upon matters which are obvious and which came into the open at the trial.

His allegations about my daughter are of course absurd, both as to his feelings and as to hers. My daughter always regarded him as a sort of "funny uncle" and there is no doubt that she was very sorry for him, and pity can be mistaken for fondness and can even be a sort of fondness, and in this sort of way perhaps she was fond of him. His great "passion" for her is a typical dream-up. (I will explain what I think about its origin and motives in a moment.) I believe that unfulfilled frustrated people probably spend a lot of their lives in pure fantasy-dreaming. This can I am sure be a great source of consolation though not always harmless. And a "good" fantasy-dream might be to pick on some person whom you know slightly and imagine they are in love with you and picture a great love-relationship and its drama. BP, being probably some sort of sadomasochist, of course imagines an unhappy ending, an eternal separation, terrible sufferings for love, and so on. His one published novel (he implies he published more than one, but he only published one in fact) is a story of disappointed romantic love quite remarkably like this one.

There is, I feel I must now frankly admit, yet a further aspect to the matter, and one which for various reasons, many of them obvious, was glossed over at the trial. Bradley Pearson was of course in love with me. This fact had been known to me and to my husband for a number of years and was also a subject for amusement. BP's fantasies of making love to me make sad reading. This unhappy love of his also explains his fiction of a passion for my daughter. This fiction is of course a smoke-screen. It is also partly a "substitute-idea" and partly, I am afraid, a pure revenge. (It may also be relevant that the strong attachment between father and daughter, not admitted in the story, may well have preyed upon BP and made him feel again, as so often, miserably excluded.) How far BP's love for me led him to perform that terrible deed is not for me to say. I am afraid that envy and jealousy were inextricably mixed up inside the bosom of that wicked and unhappy man. Of these matters, of which I would not have spoken if not forced to by confrontation with this farrago of lies, I say no more.

It may be imagined how profoundly this document distresses me. I do not in fact blame BP for its proposed disgraceful publication. It is at least understandable that he should have written out this dreamy-fantasy-nonsense to console himself in a place of grimness and to distract himself from serious remorse or the effort of repentance. For the crime of publication I blame the self-styled Mr. Lox-ias (or "Luxius," as I believe he sometimes calls himself). As several newspapers have hinted, this is a nom de guerre of a fellow-prisoner upon whom the unfortunate BP seems to have become distressingly fixated. The name conceals the identity of a notorious rapist and

murderer, a well-known musical virtuoso, whose murder, by a peculiarly horrible method, of a successful fellow-musician made the headlines some considerable time ago. Possibly the similarity of their crime drew these two unhappy men together. Artists are notoriously an envious race.

I would like to say this at the end, and I am sure I speak also for :,:, FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE my daughter, with whom I am temporarily out of touch, now of course herself a well-known writer and living abroad. I bear him no malice and, in so far as he must be regarded as seriously unbalanced if not actually mad, I feel sincere pity for his undoubted sufferings.

• K 357 POSTSCRIPT BY JULIAN have read the story. I have also seen the other postscripts, which I believe the other postscript writers have not. Mr. Loxias allowed me this privilege. (For several reasons which I can guess.) However I have little to say.

It is a sad story full of real pain. It was a dreadful time for me and I have forgotten much of it. I loved my father very dearly. This is perhaps the chief fact which I have to offer. I loved him. His violent death drove me nearly mad. I was nearly mad during Pearson's trial. I cannot recall that period of my life except as patches in a haze, as scenes. There is a mercy in oblivion. Human beings forget much more than is usually recognized, especially when there is a shock.

Not so many years have passed since these events. Yet in the life of a young person these are long years. Centuries separate me from these events. I see them diminished and myself there as a child. It is the story of an old man and a child. I say this, treating it as literature. Yet I acknowledge that it concerns myself. Are we what we were as children? What stuff is that which persists? I was a child: I acknowledge myself: yet also I cannot recognize myself.

A letter, for instance, is quoted. Did I write this letter? (Did he keep it?) It seems inconceivable. And the things that I said. (Supposedly.) Surely they are the invention of another mind. Sometimes the reactions of the child are too childish. I think I am "clever" now. Could clever me have been that child? Sometimes too there are thoughts which I could not possibly have thought. Thoughts which have leaked in from the author's mind. (I am not a very convincing "character.") Was I not muddled and frightened and without precedents? It seems like literature, yes.

My father was quite right not to encourage me to write. And Pearson was wrong to encourage me. I see that now. It is profitless to write early, one understands nothing. One has no craft and one is 358 FOUR POSTSCRIPTS BY DRAMATIS PERSONAE the slave of emotion. Time of young days is better spent in learning. Pearson implies that my father thought little of my abilities. The contrary is the case. My

father was a man who often said the opposite of what he thought. Out of modesty or fear of destiny. This is not uncommon.

Dr. Marloe describes the book as "cold," and one understands him. There is a lot of theory in this book. Yet also it is a very "hot" book (too hot), full of unstudied personal emotions. And of immediate judgments, sometimes not good ones. Perhaps it needs, like a poem, to be again and again reflected? Perhaps any novel needs further reflection and a truly great writer would write only one novel. (Flaubert?) My mother refers to me rightly as a writer but wrongly as well-known. (I am a poet.)

So I am careful and sparing with words. There is a ring in what Pearson says about silence. That part I liked. He may be right that an experience is richest not talked of. As between two people talk to an outsider destroys. Art is secret secret secret. But it has some speech or it would not be. Art is public public public. (But only when it is good.) Art is brief. (Not in a temporal sense.) It is not science or love or power or service. But it is the only true voice of these. It is their truth. It delves and chatters not.

Pearson always hated music. I can remember that. I can remember his brusquely switching off my father's record player. (A violent act.) I was a small child then. I see the scene. He hated it. Mr. Loxias must be a good teacher. (Indeed I know he is: if "teacher" is the word.) But is there not an irony? Pearson worked hard at writing all his life. I saw his notebooks. They looked liked work. There were a great many words there. Now there is music and no more words perhaps. Now there is music and beyond it silence. Why?

I confess that I never read the books that Pearson wrote. I think there is more than one. My mother is wrong here. I did not think he was a very good critic either. I think he understood only the vulgar side of Shakespeare. But I admired what I thought of as his life. He seemed an example: a lifetime at trying and failing. It seemed remarkable to go on trying. (Sometimes it seemed stupid however.) Naturally I admired, my father too. There was no conflict. Perhaps some prescient instinct made me love the idea of a small publication. (A poet who is a novelist's child must deplore the parent's verbosity.) The idea of the secret worker making little things. But it was only an idea. Pearson published as much as he could. If my father was the carpenter, Pearson was certainly the walrus.

This is not a personal statement. Words are for concealment, art is concealment. Truth emerges from secrecy and laconic discipline. I want to argue about a general matter. Pearson seems to me merely sentimental when he concludes that music is the highest art. Does he believe it? He is parroting. No doubt Mr. Loxias has influenced him. Music is an art and also a symbol of all art. Its most universal symbol.

But the highest art is poetry because words are spirit at its most refined: its ultimate matrix. Excuse me, Mr. Loxias.

Most important of all. Pearson was wrong to identify his Eros with the source of art. Even though he says one is a "mere" shadow of the other. Indeed it is the hotness of the book that I feel, not its coldness. True art is very very cold. Especially when it portrays passion. For only so can passion be portrayed. Pearson has muddied the waters. Erotic love never inspires art. Or only bad art. To be more precise. Soul-energy may be called sex down to the bottom. (Or up to the top.) That concerns me not. The deep springs of human love are not the springs of art. The demon of love is not the demon of art. Love is concerned with possession and vindication of self. Art with neither. To mix up art with Eros, however black, is the most subtle and corrupting mistake an artist can commit. Art cannot muddle with love any more than it can muddle with politics. Art is concerned neither with comfort nor with the possible. It is concerned with truth in its least pleasant and useful and therefore most truthful form. (Is it not so, you who listen?) Pearson was not cool enough. Neither was my father.

Even this does not explain. Pearson said that every artist is a masochist to his muse. Though by now perhaps he has seen the falseness of this. (It is possibly the key to his own failure.) Nothing could be falser. The worshipping attitude concentrates on self. The worshipper kneels as Narcissus kneels to gaze into the water. Dr. Marloe says artists give houseroom to the universe. Yes. But then they cannot be narcissists. And of course not all artists are homosexuals. (What nonsense!) Art is not religion or worship or the acting out of obsessions. Good art is not. The artist has no master. No, none.

Julian Belling

Mr. Loxias who has read the above tells me I have not said whether I endorse Pearson or my mother. I have not seen or communicated with either for several years. Naturally I endorse (roughly) what my mother says. However what Pearson has to say is true in its way. As for Mr Loxias, about whom there has been speculation: I think know who he is. He will understand when I say that I have mixed feelings about him. What does truth mean to him, I wonder I feel I should in fairness add something else. I think the child I was loved the man Pearson was. But this was a love which words cannot describe. Certainly his words do not. A 1 failure.

Editor's Postscript

Since the foregoing documents were collected my dear friend Bradley Pearson has died. He died in prison of a quick-growing cancer, which developed soon after he finished his book. I was his only mourner.

There is after all little for me to say. I had thought, as editor, to have written a long essay, criticizing and drawing morals. I had looked forward with some pleasure to having the last word. But Bradley's death has made a lengthy commentary seem otiose. Death cannot silence art, but it can suggest spaces and pauses. So I have little to say. The reader will recognize the voice of truth when he hears it. If he does not, so much the worse for him.

I cannot forbear to make a few remarks, most of them obvious, about the postscripts. Mrs. Belling says, in part rightly, that words are for concealment. How little the postscript-writers have been able to avail themselves of this decency. These people are indeed on display. Each lady, for instance, asserts (or implies) that Bradley was in love with her. Even the gentleman asserts it. Touching. However this is a small matter and to be expected. Equally to be expected are the lies. Mrs. Baffin lies to protect herself, Mrs. Belling to protect Mrs. Baffin. How conveniently hazy Mrs. Selling's memory has now become! This is an understandable piety, although mother and daughter have long broken off all relations. "Dr." Marloe, who told the truth at the trial, pusillanimously fails to repeat it now. I am told he has been threatened by Mrs. Baffin's solicitors. "Dr." Marloe is no hero. For this we must forgive him. Bradley, who never saw these sad "postscripts" to his work, would have done so.

My intention in publishing these papers was originally twofold. First, to give to the public a work of literature. I am by nature an impresario, and this is not the first time I have been thus instrumental. Secondly, I wished to vindicate the honour of my dear friend, to clear him, briefly, of the charge of murder. That I have not been assisted in this task by either Mrs. Belling or "Dr." Marloe is, as I say, not surprising, though it is saddening. I have seen much of human beings over a long period, and I have learnt how little good to expect from them. In pursuance of my second objective, I had intended to write a long analysis of my own, rather like a detective's final summing up, pointing out discrepancies, making inferences, drawing conclusions. This I have decided to omit. Partly because Bradley is dead. And death always seems to commit truth to some wider and

larger court. And partly because, rereading Bradley Pearson's story, I feel that it speaks for itself.

Two things remain. One to give some brief account of Bradley Pearson's last days. The other to take issue (on a theoretical point only: I leave the facts to her conscience) with Mrs. Belling. The latter I will do first, also briefly. Art, my dear Mrs. Belling, is a very much tougher and coarser plant than you seem to be imagining in your very literary piece. Your eloquence, which verges, I fear, on the romantic, even the sentimental, is that of a young person. When you are older in art you will understand better. (You may even then be privileged to understand Shakespeare's vulgarity.) About the soul we speak always in metaphors: metaphors which are best used briefly and then thrown away. About the soul perhaps we can only converse directly with our intimates. This makes moral philosophy vain. And there is no science of these things. There is no depth to which you, Mrs. Belling, or any other human being, can see where 364 EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT you can make final distinctions about what does and what does not essentially nourish art. Why are you so anxious to divide that great blackamoor in two, what are you afraid of? (The answer to this question could tell you much.) To say that great art can be as vulgar and as pornographic as it pleases is to say but little. Art is to do with joy and play and the absurd. Mrs. Baffin says that Bradley was a figure of fun. All human beings are figures of fun. Art celebrates this. Art is adventure stories. (Why do you deride adventure stories, Mrs. Baffin?) Of course it is to do with truth, it makes truth. But to that anything can open its eyes. Erotic love can. Bradley's synthesis may seem nai've; perhaps it is. Behind his unity there may be distinctions, but behind the distinctions there is unity and how far into that vista can a human being see and how far does an artist need to see? Art has its own austerity to it reserved. At an austere philosophy it can only mock.

As for music, which Mrs. Belling acutely says is the image of all the arts but not their king: I am not disposed to disagree. In fact I am well placed to appreciate her argument. Known as a musician, I am in fact interested in all the arts. Music relates sound and time and so pictures the ultimate edges of human communications. But the arts form not a pyramid but a circle. They are the defensive outer barriers of language, whose elaboration is a condition of all simpler modes of communication. Without these defences men sink to beasts. That music points to silence is again an image, which Bradley used. All artists dream of a silence which they must enter, as some creatures return to the sea to spawn. The creator of form must suffer formlessness. Even risk dying of it. What would Bradley Pearson have done if he had lived? Would he have written another book, a great one? Perhaps. The human soul is full of surprises.

Bradley died well, tenderly, gently, as a man should. I so clearly recall the look upon his face of simple vulnerable surprise when (I was present) the doctor told him the worst. He looked as he had looked once when he dropped a capacious teapot and saw it break. He said, "Oh!" and turned to me. The rest was fast. He soon took to his bed. The hand of death modelled him speedily, soon made his head a skull. He did not try to write. He talked with me, asked me to explain things, holding my hand. We listened to music together.

On the morning of the last day he said to me, "My dear fellow, I'm sorry--to be still here--so boring." Then he said, "Don't make a fuss, will you?"

"What about?"

"That opera--"

"Which?"

"Rosenkavalier." After that he was silent for a while. Then, "How did it end? That young fellow--what was his name--?"

"Octavian."

"Did he stay with the Marschallin or did he leave her and find a young girl of his own age?"

"He found a young girl of his own age and left the Marschallin."

"Well, that was right, wasn't it." Then after a while he turned, still holding my hand, and snuggled down as if to sleep. And slept.

I am glad to think how much I comforted his last days. I felt as if he had suffered the lack of me throughout his life; and at the end I suffered with him and suffered, at last, his mortality. I needed him too. He added a dimension to my being.

As for my own identity: I can scarcely, "Dr." Marloe, be an invention of Bradley's, since I have survived him. Falstaff, it is true, sur-vivid Shakespeare, but did not edit his plays. Nor am I, let me assure Mrs. Hartbourne, in the publishing trade, though more than one publisher has reason to be grateful to me. I hear it has even been suggested that Bradley Pearson and myself are both simply fictions, the invention of a minor novelist. Fear will inspire any hypothesis. No, no. I exist. Perhaps Mrs. Baffin, though her ideas are quite implausibly crude, is nearer to the truth. And Bradley existed. Here upon the desk as I write these words stands the little bronze of the buffalo lady. (The buffalo's leg has been repaired.) Also a gilt snuffbox inscribed A Friend's Gift. And Bradley Pearson's story, which I made him tell, remains too, a kind of thing more durable than these. Art is not cosy and it is not mocked. Art tells the only truth that ultimately matters. It is the light by which human things can be mended. And after art there is, let me assure you all, nothing.

P.L.

The End